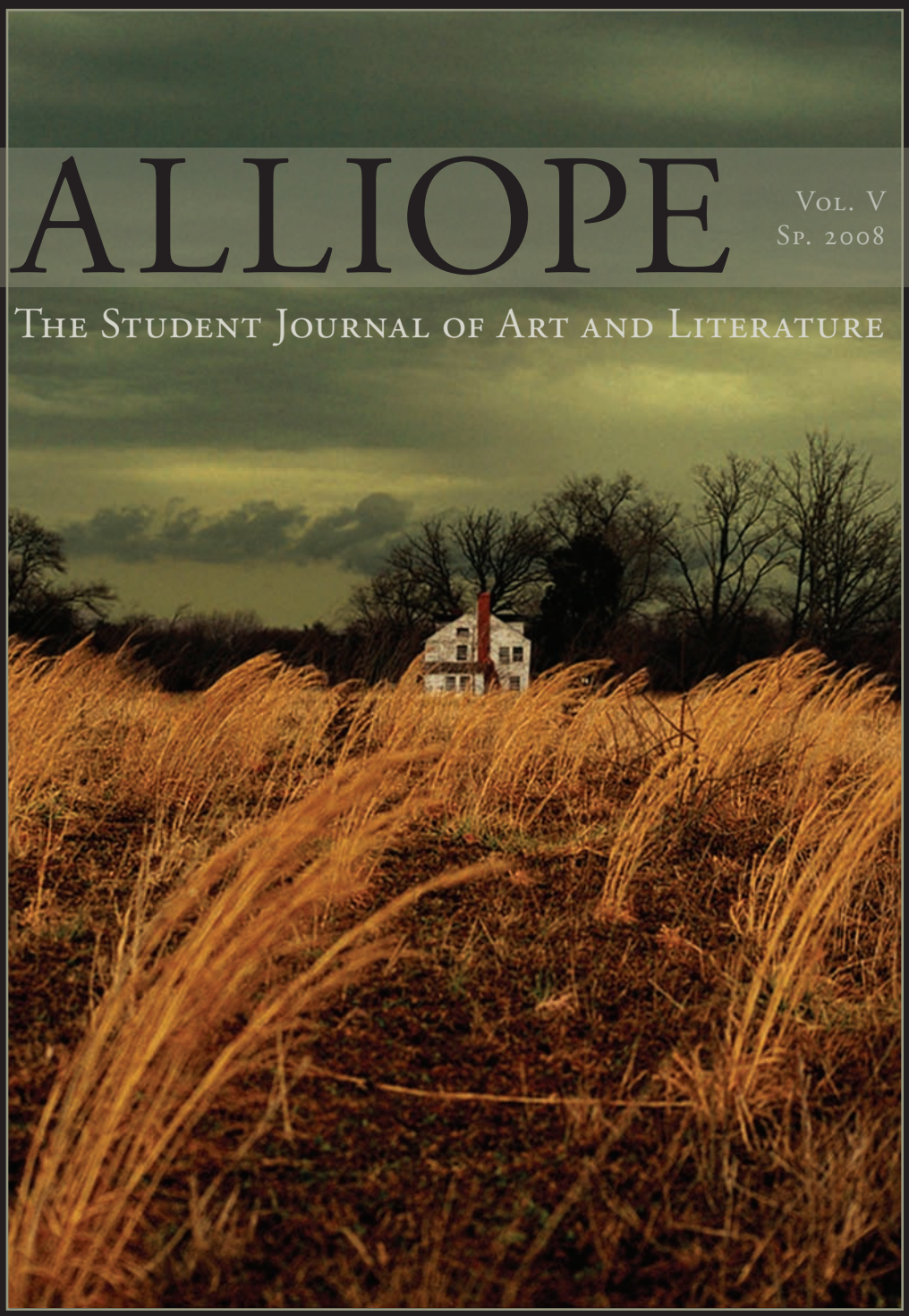
CALLIOPE

Vol. V
Sp. 2008

The Student Journal of Art and Literature



Annandale Campus
Northern Virginia Community College

CALLIOPE

The Student Journal of Art and Literature
Volume V — Spring 2008

Poetry

1	M. Taylor Johnson	*Too Young*	
2	Ashlee Walker-Jones	*Color Synaesthesia*	
6	Lisa Korpusik	*Two Hikers Diverge*	
10	Tina Kim	*Broken Toy*	
17	Joseph Coram	*Tired Sirens*	
18	Javier Portocarrero	*Paper and Plastic Doldrums*	
21	S. Ann Robinson	*Pruning*	3rd Prize
25	Ashlee Walker-Jones	*Untitled*	1st Prize
28	Colette Ann Shade	*Dad's Meal*	
59	Elizabeth "Izzi" Angel	*4 AM, Midwest Sunny-Side Up*	2nd Prize

Creative Non-Fiction

3	Katherine Raheem	*Death by Camera*	1st Prize
11	M. Taylor Johnson	*Midsummer*	3rd Prize
19	Erik Witteborg	*You've Heard Wrong, I'm Deaf-initely Normal*	2nd Prize
22	Tiffany Boakye	*Losing It*	
57	Kerry Butler	*Grandfather's Walnuts*	Hon. Mention
60	Colette Ann Shade	*A Visit to the American Mausoleum*	
62	Alaa Alhajomar	*The Doomed Wedding Bells*	Hon. Mention
65	Conner Morgan	*Leftovers*	

Fiction

7	Joyce Patti	*Election Year Blues*	Hon. Mention
13	Katherine Raheem	*No Matter What*	1st Prize
26	Sean Fitzgerald	*Patch of Grass between Two Highways*	3rd Prize
45	M. Taylor Johnson	*Graduation*	
50	James Taube	*This is the Business We've Chosen*	
53	Carlos Rosales	*Just a Bastard Child*	Hon. Mention
67	Elizabeth Wright	*Butterflies*	2nd Prize

Art

Cover	Noor Alhomsi	*What's Left of Lorton*	Cover Prize
12	Rachel Shirey	*Baby Racoon*	
17	Linda Jean King	*Linda's Lion*	
25	Dung T. Nguyen	*Sketchpage*	
29	Noor Alhomsi	*My Father's Tunnel*	
30	Sylvia Witting	*Living Ocean I*	2nd Prize
31	Evan Nepala	*Spirit of Vitality*	Hon. Mention
32	Bita Ghavami	*Boone, NC*	
33	Catherine Daniels Riveros	*Grey and Cold Winter Morning*	
34	Rachel Shirey	*Collage*	3rd Prize
35	Evan Nepala	*Kids in the Water*	1st Prize
36	Andrew Greeson	*Headstrong*	
37	Evan Nepala	*Koi Clustered*	Hon. Mention
38	Alex Stasko	*Hidden Face*	
39	Andrew Greeson	*It'll Tickle Your Innards*	
40	Oktawian Otlewski	*Silo*	
41	Natalia Schindledecker	*Still Life in Drawing*	
42	Rachel Shirey	*Yellow Flower*	
43	Noor Alhomsi	*The Red Balloon*	
44	Grace Elizabeth Plant	*Lizard*	
49	Bita Ghavami	*Loading Dock Olley*	Hon. Mention
56	Erin Findley	*Bull's Eye*	
64	Dung T. Nguyen	*Inkwash (after Diego Rivera)*	

Calliope, c/o The Division of Languages and Literature
Northern Virginia Community College
8333 Little River Turnpike
Annandale, VA 22003-3796

Acknowledgements

The 2008 Calliope Committee and Editorial Staff includes NVCC faculty members Liona Burnham, Adam Chiles, Jennifer Daniels, Nicole Foreman, Yuemin He, Theresa Knight McFadden, Erik Nielson, Raymond Orkwis, Christina Wells, and Elaine Wolin. Interns providing valuable assistance were M. Taylor Johnson, Katherine Raheem, Ashlee Walker-Jones, and Noor Alhomsi. The judges for the awards in the literary categories were English faculty Charles Scarborough, Susan Sharpe, and Jenny Sullivan. Gulio Porta, Thomas Hardy, Theresa Knight McFadden, and Ginger Haydon juried the artwork, along with members of the Calliope Committee. The judge for the art awards was Robert Epstein. As always, these people were given the difficult task of deciding what among the best entries should be specially honored. Special thanks to Damon Green for his design work on this issue.

The Calliope Committee is extremely grateful to the many students who submitted their writing and art for consideration this year. These works are the substance of the journal, which would literally be empty without them. The many visual and literary pieces that comprise this issue reflect the talent and energy that abound on the Annandale campus. We wish we could have included more submissions, but because of space limitations, many pieces had to go unpublished. We hope that no one is discouraged by this and that students whose work was not selected this time around will submit again next year.

The Committee extends special appreciation to faculty and staff in the following offices, divisions, and committees for their ongoing and generous support for *Calliope*:

The Office of the Provost;

The Office of Student Development;

The Division of Languages and Literature;

The Division of Liberal Arts;

The Lyceum Committee;

The Languages and Literature Events Committee;

The Media Manager and Staff of the NOVA Office of Public Information and Publications;

And the faculty and students of the Annadale campus creative writing and art courses.

Special thanks go to Jerry Boyd and Joyce Brotton in the Division of Languages and Literature, to Bruce Mann and Duncan Tebow in the Division of Liberal Arts, and to Terry Alford of the Lyceum Committee. Each of these people gave essential support to the journal and the accompanying all-campus ceremony celebrating its publication.

Calliope is published each spring at the Annandale campus of the Northern Virginia Community College through a collaboration of the Department of English and Liberal Arts under the sponsorship of the Division of Languages and Literature.

Submissions are welcomed from September through February each year at Calliope@nvcc.edu. Submission guidelines are available at http://www.nvcc.edu/annandale/langlit/eng/calliope. *Calliope* reserves the right to reprint and present submitted works on the *Calliope* website and other media. Students interested in joining the *Calliope* staff as interns should contact the editors at the address provided above.

calliope *kal<e>i:opi. U.S. (Gr. Kallioph)*

(beautiful-voiced), the ninth of the Muses,
presiding over eloquence and heroic poetry.

1. An instrument consisting of a series of
steam-whistles toned to produce musical notes,
played by a keyboard like that of an organ

2. attrib. calliope hummingbird,
a hummingbird, sellula ***calliope***, of the
Western United States and Mexico.
Oxford English Dictionary

TOO YOUNG

by M. Taylor Johnson

I'm getting old and jaded and I think you might be, too
Our photographs are faded into melancholy blue
And as I look back over the years and wonder what went wrong
With all my childish dreams and fears, I'm too young to write this song

I'm getting old and tired and I think you feel the same
All the things we once aspired to have fallen into shame
Maturity has a bitter taste, much more so than we'd heard
With so much time still left to waste, I'm too young to write these words

I'm getting old and frightened like a child in the dark
We're supposed to be enlightened but there's no light in this heart
Each day I find myself the same, naïve and unprepared
In this world of endless change, I'm too young to be this scared

I'm getting old and lonely and I think you understand
So if you would please hold me, or simply take my hand
For even as young as I am, I'm too grown up to lie
You've got to stay here if you can – I'm too young to say goodbye.

COLOR SYNAESTHESIA

by Ashlee Walker-Jones

I was a "surprise" when I was born
A weak little thing with jaundice
and startling black eyes
Big momma predicted I'd be neurotic

By five
My brow was permanently furrowed
That year we moved into the house
with blue shutters
Its sagging yellow walls
Became a collection of shrieking holes

Age ten, spindly legs, wool knee socks
I am about the size of a whisper
I entered the land without roses
The shadows were watching me even then
I moved about like a cloud
every day in my green plaid
I was fed plenty of dirt sandwiches

In high school I downed dozens of diet pills before gym
I liked seeing those spots of darkness
dance over everything
I remember the smell of old sweat
on a heap of dusty mats
Those crumbling cinder block walls…
The dead angel wrapped in a wail of blood
called my name over and over
what a dark and windowless world

Now, I emit opium
I move slowly as a leaf on water
counting each step
Day after day I return
to my empty apartment
to eat cold soup with thin limbs
Every morning I'm propelled by pills
The white one, the purple, the green –
Lonely as a beetle
with startling black eyes
Wearing death upon my breast like a pin

DEATH BY CAMERA

by Katherine Raheem

First Prize – Non-Fiction
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

The day that I almost died, my family and I were on safari in Minneriya National Park in my dad's homeland, Sri Lanka. It's a breathtakingly beautiful island, with bleached white sandy beaches sparkling under the blazing sun, and the crystalline waters of the Indian Ocean shimmering like a sea of sequined silk in the distance. The tiny country is home to some 20 million people – and, far more importantly, nearly 2,000 elephants. Those elephants are what brought us to Minneriya, one of the largest wildlife parks in Sri Lanka.

The air was humid and perfumed by the exotic plants growing everywhere. So far we'd been out for two and a half hours. We'd chosen an afternoon safari, which timed our exit from the park perfectly – we would be leaving just as dusk settled over Minneriya. The onset of dusk in a park filled with wildlife (emphasis on wild) is a magical time, with the darkened skies acting like a dinner bell calling every animal, from leopards to sloth bears to elephants, out for food. This also makes dusk a highly dangerous time to be in the park, which is precisely why safaris end before sunset and don't begin again until sunrise the following day. The single most important rule for people visiting the park is to be out before dark.

We weren't out, and it was getting dark. Daddy, photographer extraordinaire, had pulled one of his last-minute maneuvers and convinced our driver to bring the Jeep around to the far side of the Minneriya Water Tank so he could get pictures of a herd from a better angle. The driver navigated the Jeep through a series of muddy ruts bordering the tank, and it was just as I thought to myself that the driver was pretty skilled that the Jeep lodged itself neatly in the mud. Irritated with myself for jinxing us, but not enough to get out and help, I let myself doze in the back of the Jeep.

I don't know how much time had passed when I was abruptly awoken by a sharp smack on the side of my head, because, God forbid, my brother wake me gently. As my eyes blinked open, a curse danced on the tip of my tongue, but Hassan brought a finger to his lips to quiet me. With a knowing smile, he moved his finger and pointed to the road ahead of us.

And there, standing in the middle of the path walled in by rich, tall green grasses, was an enormous bull elephant.

I stood up slowly, the way those two scientists do in *Jurassic Park* when they first see the long neck dinosaurs, like if I moved too quickly I'd break the spell and find out I was dreaming.

Our driver was nervous. He was a young guy speaking in rapid-fire Sinhalese to my dad, but Dad wasn't paying much attention. He stood near me snapping picture after picture with his beloved Nikon. Usually the rest of us would start complaining after he took the four hundredth shot, but now we were transfixed, unwilling to break the spell, to even consider the reality of the situation. Here we were in a wildlife park filled with dozens of potentially vicious animals, and for whatever reason, we weren't scared. My heart actually seemed to beat slower than it had been, and I drew even, long breaths, trying to memorize every moment, to trace its textures and dips and divots and remember it forever.

The driver was clearly in a hurry and motioned for us to get going, but Dad was immersed in conversation with our tracker (wilderness guide).

"He's a young elephant, teenage – see how he has no spots on his trunk?" Dad's voice was soft as he translated. "The tracker thinks he was probably kicked out of his herd for being too violent and pushy with the females. He's in musk, the male version of being in heat, so he must have been acting up and they threw him out."

"So we're playing chicken with an elephant that was so rough a bunch of other elephants pulled rank and made him leave?"

Dad "shh-ed" me and raised his camera to his eye again. The driver said something that sounded pleading and desperate. Dad gave him a brief response, using a word I actually knew – the number five. He was clearly doing the old, "Five more minutes, just five more minutes." Well, he could have five thousand minutes; I was content to spend eternity looking at this beautiful creature.

I should have been scared. I would have been, I guess, if I wasn't so lost in the moment. But my eyes were locked on his, on the elephant's, and it felt like time was standing still. Maybe it was; the moment seemed to last forever.

But, like all moments of absolute beauty and tranquility, it was broken.

The flash of Dad's camera snapped both myself and the elephant from our shared trance. The elephant raised his head until he held it so high I got the distinct impression that he was looking down his nose – trunk – at us.

"Dad!" I kept my voice quiet but there was a sharpness to my tone that made him glance over at me with a questioning look. "You're pissing him off."

"But he looks so amazing pissed off."

"*Dad*, can't you at least turn off the flash?"

"Too dark." I knew he had tuned out of our conversation as he lifted the camera again. He took another few pictures while I watched the elephant, trying to gauge his reaction.

Another flash.

Very suddenly, the elephant raised his front right foot and stamped it back against the ground hard enough to shake the Jeep. He scraped his foot back and forth in the dirt, kicking dust in our direction. Something about his air, his attitude, the sharpness of his eyes, gave me the distinct impression that he was low on patience.

"Oh, but this will be a beautiful one," Dad whispered, and before I could tell him no –

It all happened at once; Dad's camera flashed, painfully bright, glaring and jarring; the tracker yelled something at the driver; the car lurched backwards; and the elephant, with a movement so confident and powerful that I think my heart may actually have stopped, charged forward, shoulders hunched so that he looked even bigger than he already was.

I would've screamed but I couldn't. I froze, watching with a mixture of horror and fascination as the elephant thundered toward us. I could hear the grind of the Jeep's engine – the car was stalling. As the driver kept trying to spur the car on, the Jeep made painful noises and I wondered fleetingly if this was how I'd die. Death by elephant. Somehow, the prospect didn't seem that horrible. My obituary would make for good copy.

He was a breath away, his ears flapping, his trunk raised, a low trumpet, like a growl, emitting from his mouth.

And then, to our utter astonishment, the elephant stopped, just stopped, right there in front of us. We were all silent and my eyes were on his – and I swear to God, he was looking straight back at me. He suddenly let out this little snort that was so humanlike I laughed; the sound was one of annoyance and amusement. I felt a perfect sense of calm as I smiled. And the elephant, eyes still on mine, reached his trunk out, pressed it to the front of the Jeep, and gave us a shove backwards.

The engine sparked to life. The driver slammed on the gas. In the back, my whole family was thrown across the seats. Everyone except me, that is. I was still standing, my hands clasped around the bars of the open Jeep, staring back at the elephant, at my elephant. As a smile curved my lips, I could've sworn I saw an answering one glowing in his eyes.

Oh, by the way, we found out about a month later that Dad had chosen to keep a tidbit of information from us. Looking through our slides of Sri Lanka, waiting with anticipation for the shots of the bull elephant, Dad glanced down at the floor, then raised his eyes, grinned sheepishly, and made his confession:

"Yeah, so… funny story! Turns out there was no film in the camera."

TWO HIKERS DIVERGE

by Lisa Korpusik

She has rushed ahead,
leaving her partner behind,
something has captivated her view,
called out and drew her in-
closer.
The photographer stays behind,
trying to capture in pixels
the hidden force of nature,
invisible to many.
She stands, hands on head,
eyes wide, mouth ajar.
Rustling in the thick ferns, a
subtle wind rocks them back and forth,
sends her floating off on thoughts
she has been searching years for.
The photographer remains,
he catches her pose, the weight of her hands,
the perfect angle of sun upon trees,
the circle of light, just bright enough
to highlight, but not overwhelm
the woman standing inside
her dream.

ELECTION YEAR BLUES

by Joyce Patti

Honorable Mention – Fiction
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

"So who'd you vote for?" asked the young man of the woman with him as they left the polling place at Fairfax High School.

"Obama," she replied happily.

"Oh boy, Julie, you're old man is gonna be pissed," he said with a frown.

"I know, so I don't think I'm gonna tell him," was her sad reply.

The exchange brought back long-buried memories for the woman walking behind the couple. Her stomach knotted and hands clenched. The last time Marie's father hit her was during the 11:00 news one sultry night in the summer of 1972. It all happened in the pine-paneled family room of the sprawling rambler they shared. It was a lovely home. The picture window looked out on the pool. Marie had just finished her senior year in high school. Much to her parents dismay she had worn a black armband to school every day for three years as a protest of the war in Viet Nam. The armband was accompanied by the half dozen or so POW bracelets that she wore so that the fathers of her friends would not be forgotten. The metallic clinking of the bracelets as she moved were a constant reminder of her dissent. Her parents believed that she was rebelling. She knew that she simply believed them to be wrong.

Fortunately for Marie she was a good student and didn't get into any other trouble. Her parents were constantly concerned that she was taking drugs or doing other heinous things that they couldn't imagine clearly enough to articulate but just knew were out there to be done. She reflected on this sadly as she got into her car because they missed really getting to know her at a time when she would have welcomed it. She had just recognized deep in her soul that we did not belong in Viet Nam. She had not believed that if Viet Nam became Communist so would every other country in the region and eventually the U.S. would be forced to relinquish its way of life and embrace communism too. It just hadn't made sense to her.

She smiled as she thought about that part. She had been so certain, so passionate in her beliefs; just like her parents, actually. Funny, she didn't see that then. She had turned eighteen that year – the first year that eighteen year olds were eligible to vote and she intended to exercise the privilege. She and a group of friends found the local Democratic campaign office and pitched in to volunteer with the campaign that summer. She was, admittedly, madly in love with a left-wing, pony-tailed Democrat named Chris. He wasn't just a dissenter

though; he was also class president, so he wasn't *that* far out of the mainstream. They had been together for two years. She loved everything about him. Her parents found him hard to dislike because he was so smart and funny but they were sure he was a bad influence. They couldn't see how insulting Marie found that at the time. He simply shared beliefs that she had held for years. She wasn't just going along so he'd like her.

She and her friends were working their tails off for George McGovern. He was going to stop the war and make sure our troops were pulled out of Asia immediately. She felt so full of hope when she listened to him, confident that he was going to do the right thing. Marie couldn't see why everyone didn't get it. They worked day and night for McGovern that summer even going to the convention in Florida where they did anything that was asked of them. She could remember the thrill the night McGovern was actually named the candidate. He seemed so warm and full of conviction. The confetti and balloons fell so that you couldn't even see across the hall. They were all so hopeful. They would be rid of Tricky Dick Nixon once and for all.

Marie had been back home for about a week and life had settled comfortably into predictable rhythms. She and her father were quietly watching the 11:00 news before it was time to go to bed. She heard the ice cubes click against her father's glass as he finished off his drink. The news showed a sound bite of McGovern and under his breath, with clenched teeth, she heard her father say: "That miserable son of a bitch."

It took her breath away. She couldn't believe she'd actually heard him say that. She was furious and had no idea how to respond. It felt like a very personal attack since he knew how important this was to her. Marie turned and looked at him but his eyes were unwaveringly glued to the television set. The news program then proceeded to do a story about Richard Nixon's campaign. As they wrapped up their coverage she muttered in a low but clearly audible voice: "That miserable son of a bitch."

Her father leaped up out of his chair and she followed suit. They stood there toe to toe matching each other glare for glare; dare for dare – and then he did it. He picked up his left hand and he slapped her right across the face. Hard.

In hindsight she was absolutely shocked by her own response. It had been a long time since he had hit her last but tonight crossed a line. Marie was no longer a little girl who had to do what he said and believe what he believed. Most of all, no one had the right to touch her. She did the only thing that came to her head. Even as her right hand came up in response she couldn't believe that she was going to do it and even felt a little giddy that she finally had the nerve. As her hand connected with his face disbelief set in – after all this was her father! She hit him a little higher than she had intended and her hand hit the side of his glasses. The nosepiece cut him as his glasses flew from his face and traveled

across the room. She backed up in fear.

"You little bitch!!" he screamed as he lunged toward her. She spun around in terror because she knew what was coming, and raced for the safety of her room. It was a run of some distance. She took off out of the family room. She clearly remembered being aware of the changing texture of the floor that served as her guide: carpet, hardwood, vinyl, carpet again, cold, uncompromising slate and the blessed feel of the carpet leading into the bedroom hallway. He was screaming at her all the way but Marie never had any idea what he said. Her fear overwhelmed the sound of his voice. He kept just barely grabbing the ends of her long hair as she ran but she was always able to jerk it out of his hands. Just as she entered the hallway her mother flew out of the master bedroom. She had been awakened by the noise and commotion. She was screaming, "Bob! Bob! Stop it! You'll have a heart attack!!"

Marie reached the doorway of her room, barreled through it, slammed the door and locked it. He pounded the door and demanded that she open it while her mother kept talking to him. After a few minutes he stopped and there was silence. She was exhausted and weak kneed from the adrenaline. She didn't even leave to use the bathroom that night because she was afraid. Finally, she fell asleep.

In the morning all of the emotion from the night before flooded through her as soon as she opened her eyes. She didn't know what to do. Should she leave her room? Should she apologize? No, no apologies. Not anymore. Marie dressed quietly. When she was ready she opened the door and walked to the kitchen to get some coffee. Her father was sitting at the kitchen table reading the paper. He raised his face to look at her and as he smiled at her all she could see was the scabby place where his glasses had cut him. He said, "Good morning! How's my girl today?"

She was flabbergasted. Until the day he died, he never touched her again and they never, ever discussed that night. It was as though it had never happened and they were best buddies again. Marie continued to sit in her car in the high school parking lot as the memories poured over her. She was still flabbergasted and yet here it was, another election year. She couldn't help laughing at herself a little sadly. Maybe all elections were a little like her relationship with her father. Boom, the votes are in and in a matter of hours the work ends…and the next morning the madness and the insults are over as everybody gets up and gets along somehow.

BROKEN TOY

by Tina Kim

Mom said
I was a silent destroyer
Toys never lasted long
I ripped them apart until they were no longer usable
At least for their original use
When I grew older
I learned how to use screwdrivers
So I could see the insides
When I grew older still
I knew how to put them back together

I see
He was a silent destroyer
I wouldn't have lasted long
He ripped me apart until I couldn't smile anymore
At least not with innocence
When I grew older
I learned how to use my eyes
So I could see my insides
When I grew older still
I knew how to put myself back together

MIDSUMMER

by M. Taylor Johnson

Third Prize – Non-Fiction
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

We stayed over at a friend's house that night, a big place that we called "out in the country" where the open sky was flung out over the open land like green and blue blankets, cushioning clear air in between. We ate macaroni and cheese out on the porch, talking about anything and everything, laughing. My childhood best friend and I lay out our sleeping bags in the basement and stayed up late talking about boys and school and what we wanted to be when we grew up.

My father woke us up around three in the morning, the warm, thick midsummer of sleep, while we were still half-lost in dreams like plays written by Kafka with backdrops by Dali. We glanced at each other, grinning with childlike enthusiasm about getting up in the middle of the night, and got up. We dressed ourselves in layer after layer of winter clothes, feeling overwhelmed and stifled by the uncomfortable heat, until we finally finished tying our shoes and scrambled out the door.

Night embraced us roughly in chilly air and darkness. From the porch we walked out to the yard, blades of grass stroking our ankles and leaving wet kisses of dew on our pant legs. The dog followed, ears perked, confused by the change in schedule but enthusiastic as always. We lay out our sleeping bags and curled up inside them, rolled over, and gazed upwards.

The sky that night was the sharpest I can remember, stars prickling through my new glasses – the first I'd ever worn, round and gold-rimmed. The bright pinpoints looked down at us, unflickering, unchanged.

My father sat next to us and pointed out the constellations, already familiar to me from years and years' worth of stargazing. Orion hefted his sword in greeting; cruel Cassiopeia glared down from her throne; the Pleiades huddled together in their little sisterly coven. I stared up at the familiar figures – family friends, you could say, just like the ones beside me.

Calm fell over us and I snuggled deeper into my sleeping bag, clutching the edges around my neck so that only my face was exposed to the air. We heard an owl, far off, calling out into the night, lonely but peaceful. The dog curled up next to her owners and slept.

"Look!"

"Where?"

"I saw one!"

Suddenly we were all awake again, sitting halfway up, eyes scanning the sky. There was silence a moment, and then –

"Another!"

Three more, then ten, then twenty, and then a hundred stars shot across the sky, strands of tinsel thrown loosely over the blackness. The meteors blazed sharp and clear, their fiery trails shining briefly before fading out. We murmured our wonder, shouted in amazement when a particularly large one roared into nothingness. My father looked ever so slightly proud – proud, perhaps that he had this phenomenon to show his family; or proud that we wanted to see.

For what felt like a lifetime we just lay and watched star after falling star. No one said a word, so I don't know if the others made wishes. I did.

Just as they had faded into existence, the meteor shower faded out, the rush of searing lights dwindling down into a slower stream, the last stragglers trailing off into darkness. They left us with bright after-images streaked across our vision, glowing against our eyelids when we closed our eyes. My friend and I heartily declared that we would stay up all night. We were asleep in minutes.

I woke hours later, stiff and a little cold but feeling happy and cleansed. We got up, piled into the car, and drove home. I gazed out the window and watched the blue sky rolling over the hills, the hills rolling over the earth, the earth slowly turning beneath us as we headed for home.

Baby Racoon
by Rachel Shirey

NO MATTER WHAT

by Katherine Raheem

First Prize – Fiction
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

"Pickup-pickup-pickup …" With the phone to her ear, Annabelle whispered the words and prayed for him to answer.

"Hey guys, you've reached Nick. Since I'm not answering I'm probably with my awesome girlfriend, so call her if it's important or leave a message."

She snapped the phone shut but kept it clenched in her fist. In her other hand was a personal planner, open to the day's date. Annabelle stared at it, then shifted her eyes to the small red circle six days earlier. It glared up at her like an angry prom-night pimple.

She flipped back through the planner to the last circle, counted the days between. No matter how many times she counted, she came up with the same damning number that told her yes, it had been thirty-six days since her last period.

How the hell did that happen? She always paid attention to these things – when it came to her health Annabelle was a drill sergeant. She scheduled physicals a year in advance, took a daily cocktail of vitamins, carried around her own bottle of hypoallergenic soap. Nick called her his little hypochondriac.

Oh, Nick…

Bathed in the harsh fluorescent lights of the bathroom, Annabelle put her head in her hands and waited for the phone to ring.

* * *

Nick pushed through the crowd in front of the stage and slipped out of the club. He ignored his six new voicemails and called her. Checking his watch, he wondered, somewhat guiltily, if he'd miss the first song.

She answered on the first ring.

"Nick, I'm late."

"Yeah, I got that since we were s'posed to meet at nine – you okay?"

"No, Nick, I'm *late*."

"It's no big deal, do you want me to come pick you up?"

"You're not listening to me, Nick. I. Am. Late." From the other end of the line, Annabelle thought she could actually hear his jaw drop open.

"Oh, Jesus. Oh, man. Where are you? How late? Did you just find out?

Have you taken a test yet? Do you need – oh, shit. What can I do?"

"Please, Nick, just – just pick up a pregnancy test."

"Yeah – yeah, of course. Any brand or anything?"

"I don't know – an expensive one."

"Sure. Wait, why?"

"Because I just trust it more."

"Okay. Okay, I'll um, I'll be there soon."

"How soon?"

"I don't know, soon."

"Ten minutes? Twenty?"

"The sooner I get off the phone the sooner I'll be there."

"Please don't snap at me."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to. Fifteen minutes."

"Okay."

"Just try to breathe, drink some water, and I'll be there soon. And honey, don't psych yourself out about this. Don't think about the 'what ifs' – let's deal with one thing at a time."

"Okay…"

"I love you."

"Just come quick, 'kay? I love you too."

"Damn straight."

* * *

Nick closed the phone. He felt dizzy. Stumbling on the uneven sidewalk, Nick steadied himself and reached for his Camel Filters. Lighting up, it crossed his mind that, if she was pregnant, he'd have to quit.

When he got to his car, he saw that the asshole behind him parked so close that their bumpers were almost touching. *Oh, screw it*. He tapped the other car when he reversed but didn't stop – if there was a scratch it was their own damn fault.

Annabelle's voice had been so soft, so scared, and he felt a physical pain in his chest thinking of her all alone.

He pulled into the street and hit the gas.

* * *

Annabelle bent over the sink, turned on the faucet and cupped her hands together beneath the spout. The icy cold water made her shiver, but she splashed some on her face anyway. She had to snap out of it, had to get a grip.

It could be okay. It could really be okay. Oh, God, how will it be okay?

She was twenty-two years old and had just celebrated getting a salaried job. She wasn't ready for this. In an effort to calm herself, she tried to focus on the one thing – the one person – who always managed to tease a smile out of her.

She pictured Nick in her head, thinking of their senior prom photo. *We look so good together. We're so good together…* When Senior Superlatives were announced and they'd lost the Cutest Couple Award, Nick had been pissed. She thought of the indignant look on his face when he swore they'd been gypped. " You're beautiful," he'd said, "And let's face it, I'm pretty much off the cuteness scale."

It was true – he was a damn handsome guy. And she wasn't so bad herself.

Whatever else happens, that would be a cute baby.

Annabelle shook her head, wondering if water had leaked into her brain when she'd washed her face. Her thoughts had taken an unexpected turn. *Did* she want this? Could they do this?

Well, maybe she couldn't. But maybe *they* could.

* * *

Nick scanned the signs above each aisle in the CVS. Finding the "feminine care" section, he navigated between Tampax, Always, Monistat and Vagisil. Finally getting to the pregnancy tests, he scanned the price tags.

Clearblue… $50. Perfect. He picked up a box, then, on a stroke of inspiration, grabbed a second one.

When he reached the front of the store he saw five people waiting in a line manned by a single clerk. *Figures.*

The man ahead of him was loaded with cans of apple sauce. *Why the hell do you need that at 9:30 on a Sunday night??* The man at the front waved a coupon in the clerk's face. An old woman wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat looked disdainfully at Nick and his purchases.

Damn it, I don't have time *for this!*

The kid next to the coupon man tugged his father's shirt, saying, "Can I have this one Daddy? Please?"

That pleading tone would work on any parent with a heart. And Nick had more than enough heart. *If she really is…. Man, our kid would be so spoiled*, Nick thought, a small smile curving his lips despite his impatience. But Annabelle, she'd keep them in line – both him and their kid, boy, girl, whatever.

Ahead of him, the little boy whined "Daddy" again.

What would it be like to have a kid look up at him and call him Daddy?

Unreal. So unreal.

But not unwelcome… He was a natural caretaker. He'd grown up with three younger sisters and two lawyer parents. How many girls nights had he witnessed? Annabelle loved to tease him for being the only man in her life who knew how to French braid.

God, he couldn't believe he wasn't freaking out. Sure, he was terrified, but he was also surprisingly calm. The thought of settling down, of family life, had always hovered in his distant future… and somehow, now that the possibility was staring him in the face, he wasn't sure he wanted to turn away.

My God, Nick, you're only twenty-three. Be practical.

The line moved forward until the only thing standing between Nick and the door was Apple Sauce Guy. Nick tried for the sympathy vote and purposely dropped one box. The man picked it up and looked at Nick.

"Oh, I've been there – why the hell else am I here buying a gallon of apple sauce on a Sunday? They sure keep you busy. Go ahead, man."

Nick thanked him. The clerk took his purchases and raised an eyebrow.

"Sir? You realize each of these comes with thirty test sticks."

He looked at the box, saw that the clerk was right. "Oh. Right. Just the one then," Nick said. "There go my brownie points." Apple Sauce Guy laughed. Nick shot him a weak smile as he headed for the door.

* * *

Three minutes was an eternity. They faced each other, holding hands and holding their breath. He watched the seconds tick away on the clock, bringing them closer and closer to an uncertain future. Her hands were cold, her eyes bright. Suddenly, despite everything, Nick felt a sense of calm as he realized with complete and utter clarity how much he loved this woman.

Annabelle sat with her eyes squeezed shut. She wished time would speed up, or slow down, or stop all together. Nick's big, callused hands held hers with a tender gentleness. God, she loved him so much.

His hands tightened on hers when the second hand hit the twelve. The test lay facedown on the cool tile in the space between them. They looked at each other and his lips curved, just a little.

I love you no matter what.

They both thought it simultaneously, but the words were so clear they might have been spoken aloud. He kept one hand on hers and used the other to pick up the test. He looked at her; she nodded.

Taking a deep breath, he flipped the test over. They looked at the tiny digital screen, then at each other, then back at the screen.

And they smiled.

TIRED SIRENS

by Joseph Coram

Pantomime freedoms, her bluff
Somehow availing;
Candy-red lips packed with snuff,
Leans on the railing:

"Gather your shadows of cloud;
Each soon uncovers,
Making a home of its shroud,
Whispering lovers.

"Backlit, a thousand dark veils
Tenderness slowly disarms.
New days and thousand alarms
Call back in answer.

"Pray that brave winds catch your sail,
Dark-eyed young dancer."

Linda's Lion

by Linda Jean King

PAPER AND PLASTIC DOLDRUMS

by Javier Portocarrero

Ken confesses to Barbie he has a death wish
Can't fathom my paper monsters
He tries barbiturates
To snuff out my childish goblins
And ride the leaf storm
I recall vivid creatures that would level many great cities
Leaf angels on the dying grass
Its autumn its leaves
Now a bleak abstract
Ken goes downhill
Barbie pleads with him, implores him for help
I'm bored, a kid searching for the source
Of that noise, a banging garden gate…relentlessly…endlessly
A creaking noise, in need of oil
I never liked pumpkin pie
It is autumn, I can taste it
Leaves…and sentimentalities that are lost on a lost soul like Ken's
I see school buses…I wonder why I need school
No action, just me to bear witness to Ken's downward spiral he grows a beard
Scares Barbie with his increasingly reckless behavior
In her convertible heading down the small incline by mother's garden
A note on the margin
Although it was I pushing that toy convertible, it wasn't
I played God and watched Ken burn
Its autumn I'm a kid I'm bored
And I never liked pumpkin pie

YOU'VE HEARD WRONG, I'M DEAF-INITELY NORMAL

by Erik Witteborg

Second Prize – Creative Non-Fiction
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

"Can your parents have sex?" "Can your parents ride bicycles?" "So, like, your parents can read braille?" Anybody reading these questions would be compelled to imagine my parents with some kind of affliction of the legs, aliment of the eyes, or indisposition of the genital region. Yet questions like those were an-all-too-common experience of my childhood. I regularly fielded "cracking of a bat" questions like those out of the park daily. Apparently having Deaf parents gave people some grand illusion that I led a bizarre, abnormal life when I was at home. Do things that are considered normal for me, make your differences consequently abnormal? Could it be that we are all normal in different ways? Is normalcy relative?

"Marco! Polo!" is what "normal" families say to each other at pool time. My family, my unduly-labeled underprivileged family, can stay underwater and carry out full conversations in Sign Language. So, please, I implore you, ask me which of the two is the disabled family in this Special Olympic-sized pool. I'll just be wading around in the water, hanging out with the fish as the force of this revelation knocks you off your life-saving-flotation device. "Lifeguard!"

"AHEAMM!" a clearing of the throat is a common way I've seen parents of my friends call attention to each other. **BANG** BANG B A N G, **STOMP** STOMP S T O M P, sends vibrations racing through the floor, table, wall, whatever surface happens to be nearby and into the sensors of whomever we are trying to call. A succession of quick flicks to the light switch is how we alert each other that there is a need to converse. Waving my hand until it catches the peripheral of my parents eyes' and hooks them like a fish on the end of a rod, I keep moving my hands 'till I finally reel their eyes onto me; attention is attention.

Hearing families can talk to each other from different rooms in a house, provided there isn't any superfluous noise floating around. Deaf families, however, can carry on a conversation across a crowded room of people, providing there aren't too many tall, big-headed people standing between the two communicators. It's like the bumper sticker a lot of 18-wheeler trucks sport on the back that says: "If you can't see my mirrors, then I can't see you," except in this case it would be more like, "If you can't see me, then I can't hear you." So

it doesn't matter whether you're a car stuck behind a big rig or a Deaf person stuck behind a big head, sometimes you just have to move.

In a hearing family, one might be scolded for talking with a mouth full of food. In a Deaf family, we can efficiently chew and sign at the same time, we're only scolded when we talk with a knife in our hand. See, dinner-table etiquette tries to rule everybody - some choose to follow said rules – others choose to evolve; these evolved individuals are now commonly referred to as Deaf people.

When a child from a hearing family is upset, he might decide to swear under his breath. When I was mad I used to fling finger-spelled swear words at teachers from my see-no-evil hear-no-evil hand tucked away in my pant pocket. For the record, punishment for saying a bad word was not having our hands washed with soap! Although I was not above trying that angle in an argument between my parents and me about what exactly fair punishment should constitute in such a scenario, I would always say, let the punishment fit the crime. Punish my hand for its slip of the finger, not my chastity-belt-wearing tongue of innocence. Funny, my mouth always ended up with a zesty flavor no matter how hard I argued my case, while my fingers would still have dirt lodged under the half-moon-shaped smile of the nail.

Hearing families almost never make eye contact with each other when they talk. Apparently normal families don't value eye contact; it makes people feel uncomfortable. The only time you see hearing families locked in a stare is when two people are arguing with each other, and they don't dare take their eyes away. In my Deaf family we must have eye contact with each other, except when we argue. I guess at some point during arguments, Deaf people like to take the time to reevaluate the commodity of looking at one another.

My parents can have sex, how do you think I got here? Who do you think taught me to ride a bicycle? Do your parents buy bargain braille books from the discount bin at Barnes and Blind, why would mine? Your parents nod their heads to the music your words make as they beat against their eardrums; my parents pupils' dilate with delight as I conduct a symphony of signs directed at the comprehending blinks of, "Uh-huh, I see," played out before their corneas. The ability to understand and be understood; to hear and have your thoughts heard, whether figuratively or literally, this is what matters the most.

I'll be the first to proudly state that our families are different, but don't you dare say that mine isn't normal. Normal is as normal does. Every family is different in some way or another, so being different, like all families are, makes your family normal. My family is made normal in the difference that our families share. Being different is a result of one's experiences, experience is wholly unique to each individual, so difference is the only thing without exception that people across the spectrum of age, race, gender, religion, and culture share in common. I guess you could say being different isn't so different after all.

PRUNING

by S. Ann Robinson

Third Prize – Poetry
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

The first thing I deleted
was your e-mail;
then those menacing
blue flowers that jeered
for decades from milky white
porcelain beds.
I cleared chests, shelves,
and drawers, like a marine conducting
urban warfare; tore down
drapes and piled
clothes. That silly bear
bobbed on top – dumped
and abandoned
beneath a sign
which read "Please do not
leave donations on the sidewalk."

But it was not enough,
and I left in a heat wave to seek
a bare, un-airconditioned
condo where bulbs flickered
and catsup stood alone
in a broken refrigerator.
For days I lay naked
under a ceiling fan, rivulets
of sweat streaming off soft
mounds into shallow crevices.
As helpless as Earth, I prayed
with Beethoven and stared
at a dark spruce tree.
Its gentle branches filled
my window, like a nurse soothing
a fever.

I thought I was waiting
to end my life;
but I couldn't stop watering
a small, barren Hibiscus.

One morning it bloomed.

LOSING IT

by Tiffany Boakye

"Take it all off."

"Are you sure?" the barber asked, his clippers in hand.

"Yep, I'm positive."

Buzz, buzz. It fell all around me in bunches; balls of black cotton surrounded the base of the swivel chair. *This is what I need to do; it will all grow back eventually, right?*

Hair, its something so simple yet it carries so much meaning, especially to a woman. Curly, straight, wavy, and then there's mine, just plain ol' nappy; at least that's what everyone else used to call it. Afro puffs, twists, or even cornrows with multicolored beads at the end, that was my favorite style. I can still remember my mother and I shouting out the answers to Jeopardy as I sat between her legs while she greased my scalp; she always did it best. Back then I was nappy and free. "OoOo, she got that good hair! She must have Indian in her or something," a comment I heard way too often about other girls' lengthy locks. Back then, I never thought to ask the question that now plagues my mind, "What the heck is good hair?" Yeah, my hair has broken a few combs in its day but that just means it's strong. I'll take that over "good" hair any day.

I didn't always think like that though. Times changed and so did I. By middle school, the beads just weren't doing it for me anymore. Like most teens longing for acceptance, I hopped on the wagon changing my styles as often as the weather. I tried it all. Press and curls where my ear was the burn victim of steaming hot combs, and perms that were left in too long, stinging, leaving my scalp sore. Then there were the weaves and braids that relentlessly tugged on my delicate strands. But it was okay because beauty is pain. You couldn't tell me nothing; I always had the 'flyest' do. I didn't mind that pain though, especially after a new one began…

It was the summer after my sophomore year at St. John's University. I had just barely made a 3.0 to keep my scholarships, not to mention not be kicked out of the pharmacy program. I was just happy it was over and now all I wanted to do was relax and enjoy my summer. Well, at least until I had to leave for summer school. Then, the headaches began, excruciating day-long headaches from which I only found relief in sleep. After a week of pain, my aunt figured I wasn't just trying to get out of housework and sent me to the urgent care center.

"On a scale of one to ten, how bad is this headache?" The doctor asked me.

"10 and a half to 11."

"Hmm, really?"

I couldn't help but furrow my brow at the doctor. What kind of question? Sensing my frustration he quickly replied, "I only ask because you don't look to be in that much pain. Anyway, we'll send you for a CT scan and go from there."

From there, everything else happened in a whirlwind. An ambulance ride, several tests and a day of isolation (where I was treated like an unidentified creature) later, I was told in a nonchalant tone that I had viral meningitis, the less deadly one. So I was sent home with instructions only for plenty of rest and lots of Percocet.

Finally happy to be home, I hadn't even changed out of my hospital gown when we received a panicked phone call…"There was something we missed in our initial MRI reading. She has a blood clot in her brain, we need her back immediately!" All I kept thinking was how much I didn't want to go back to that horrible place.

"What are they going to do, Auntie Soph, am I going to have to have surgery?" I asked in a nervous voice

"Umm, no, they're just going to put you on special medication. You're going to be okay," she replied. She joined me in the back seat as my uncle sped down the highway. From how tightly she was gripping my hand, I could tell that it was not going to be as easy as she was trying to make it sound. And believe me, it was not.

See, this little 'brain malfunction' of mine is not by any means a common occurrence for someone my age and if not caught early and properly handled, the results can be fatal. Lucky for me, it was caught (although a bit late) and treated. Sometimes though, something must hurt a little before it helps. When the swelling in my brain began to go down, other problems began. Its almost like being cramped in a tiny space for a long time, when you finally get out, it takes awhile for your body to feel normal again; well, that's what happened to my brain and it made my body go haywire. Days would come when I couldn't sit or stand still with uncontrollable movements and my speech was reduced to that of a five year old. I was a whole different person. I sometimes refused to go out for fear that I would embarrass myself or my family. I was hurt physically, emotionally, and even socially. Then it hurt my hair, the hair that was part of my beauty, my creativity. First I started to notice a little extra coming out when I combed it. Then I began to feel spots that used to be thick and full now sparse. It was constantly on my mind, whether others could tell, or what they would think. I decided to get a second opinion.

"Hair loss is a common bodily reaction to a severe injury like this. It may take a while but it will grow back. Right now, it should be the least of your worries. We could have lost you so now he have to do whatever we can to keep

you here." What Dr. Coles said was right. I had just survived a brain injury. Yeah, I had to leave school for some time, and so what if I can't do some of the things I used to; I'm still here, even if my hair is not. It is only a part of me; an important part of me, yes but I doesn't define me. India Arie said it best…

I am not my hair
I am not this skin
I am a soul that lives within…

So that's what brought me to this barber's chair. "All done, take a look." He swirls me around and passes me a mirror. "I think it suits you." The hairdresser next to us says, smiling at me. "It's a bold cut. You think you'll be able to pull it off?"

"I'll manage," I say as I pay and get ready to leave. Alone in my car, I look at myself in my rearview mirror, trying to get used to my new 'do'. Looking into my own eyes, it dawns on me, it was already there. The beauty I've been trying to fabricate through perms and all, it was always there. No, it's no model, but it's me, and I like it. Giving myself one last look, I turn my car key and press play on the stereo. India's soulful voice streams through the speakers…

It's not what's on your head
It's what's underneath!

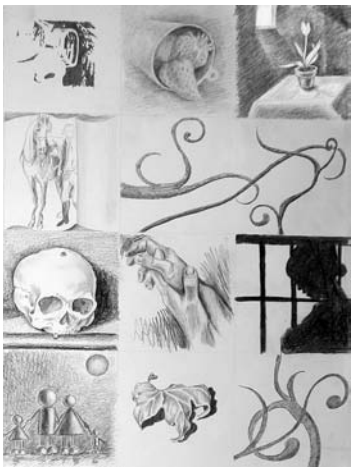
Sing it India, sing it…

UNTITLED

by Ashlee Walker-Jones

First Prize – Poetry
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

On the road its feathers are raised
In a final wave
of time and rigor.
Under a sky of curdled clouds
flies lovingly praise
their bony meal of flesh.
They swim through matted plumes
like black blood
Doomed to roam the quiet route of death:
Those wormy spikes of stiffened wings
The lonesome hunters
of putrid worlds
forced to court dead things.



Sketchpage

by Dung T. Nguyen

PATCH OF GRASS BETWEEN TWO HIGHWAYS

by Sean Fitzgerald

Third Prize – Fiction
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

It was a beautiful night. The stars shone with amplified brilliance through the smog and haze of the American sky and dripped into Michael's eyes like drops of mercury light. There was the thinnest layer of moisture on one side of each blade of grass, dampening the soles of his shoes and the seat of his faded blue jeans as he sat with his knees drawn up to his chin, his serene expression reflecting the crystalline clarity of his unclouded mind. The sounds of traffic and of the blaring horn of the crushed and gutted Honda civic, resting on two wheels and a mangled steel highway median, called for attention into the temperate summer air. Outside of time, Michael's eyes remained skyward.

The hill where Michael sat was angled at maybe 60 degrees and descended for about 12 feet into a ditch, then rose to meet the highway running in the other direction. The body rested maybe four feet down from Michael's resting place; its right arm and head were another bounce lower (Sam rolls down the window, he is in the back left seat in ¾ profile, distracted and turned away from the other three.) Moonlight glinted off of the hubcaps and cans that had migrated from the two highways into the valley between them with some wildflowers emerging from between the bits of litter. Starlight touched everything with silver and was reflected back in drops and pools of blood.

The wind kissed Michael's cheek like a woman's ghost might (June laughs and throws her head back, then turns over her left shoulder to face Michael. She is in the passenger seat; Michael is in the back right behind her.) The breeze was gentle and quiet (Karen is driving, she looks to the right) and charged with moisture and electricity, like a storm was two towns over (first a bump, then a shock of momentum. A lighter flies out of Michael's hand, then seems to change direction in midair. Broken glass.) The smell of exhaust permeated, as omnipresent as the hum of traffic in this oasis in a sea of cars.

A cricket crawled across Michael's shoe (the smell of smoke, and some sort of chalky powder released in the deployment of airbags) and tickled him as it brushed past his ankle. His attention broken (broken glass) Michael glanced down (Sam is not in the car, his shoe is in his seat, unlaced) at the tiny six legged alien that has invaded him. It was copper colored and waving its antenna (unbuckle the seat belt. June is lying across the dash half through the

windshield, blood is like chocolate syrup spreading across upholstery and steel) and Michael held its strange gaze in the stillness of the evening. The creature hopped away (out of the car, where is Karen?) and Michael stood (over the median, there is Sam, there is his head) and stretched his back.

He walked a few steps, the Earth firm and fertile beneath his sneakers. He stepped over a broken license plate (there is Karen) half buried in the soil, (is she alive? Twisted funny, blood from her mouth) stepped over a 7-11 cup. Many artifacts had washed to this place (she coughs, more blood) from the highway (she is alive, she moves her eyes, Michael crouches to look at her, her eyes still speak, she is unbelieving, and then the light winks out and she settles into the incline of the hill like she is made of cloth as all tension drains from her muscles.)

Coins and bits of scrap shone tiny moons from the dirt and scrub (Michael stands over Karen's body and adjusts his weight from foot to foot, then stretches) and now red and blue lights shone back as well (does anything hurt? Anything not working? No, Michael, everything is the same.) Michael looked over his shoulder (everything is not the same) at the smoking wreck (what to do?) with June lying blank and bloodied on the hood (have a seat right here between Karen and Sammy,) and red and blue flashed on everything like a disco (it's so peaceful here. Sit for a minute and wait for someone to come) like 3-D glasses spread over smoke and asphalt and moonlight and blood. Michael squinted and walked toward the commotion, taking care to step on no crickets as he navigated the wasteland (sit and think and take it all in. The air is still and pleasant. It is a beautiful night.

DAD'S MEAL

by Colette Ann Shade

Oh Mother! Oh Father! How could you release me to those mean streets
where all I had were a pair of worn out Chuck Taylors
and a big old record collection
in a basement apartment in Dupont Circle
back in the seventies, before the yuppies came?

I wandered days and nights,
starving,
always glancing behind me for skinny men with knives,
black coffee and nicotine my only nourishment;
I really thought I'd die.

You, with your sumptuous American profiteering
and me, spending my bus money on a pizza
that vaulted from my hands when I slipped on a patch of ice
and so that evening I walked and I starved
each step in my quivering legs a stab of derision.

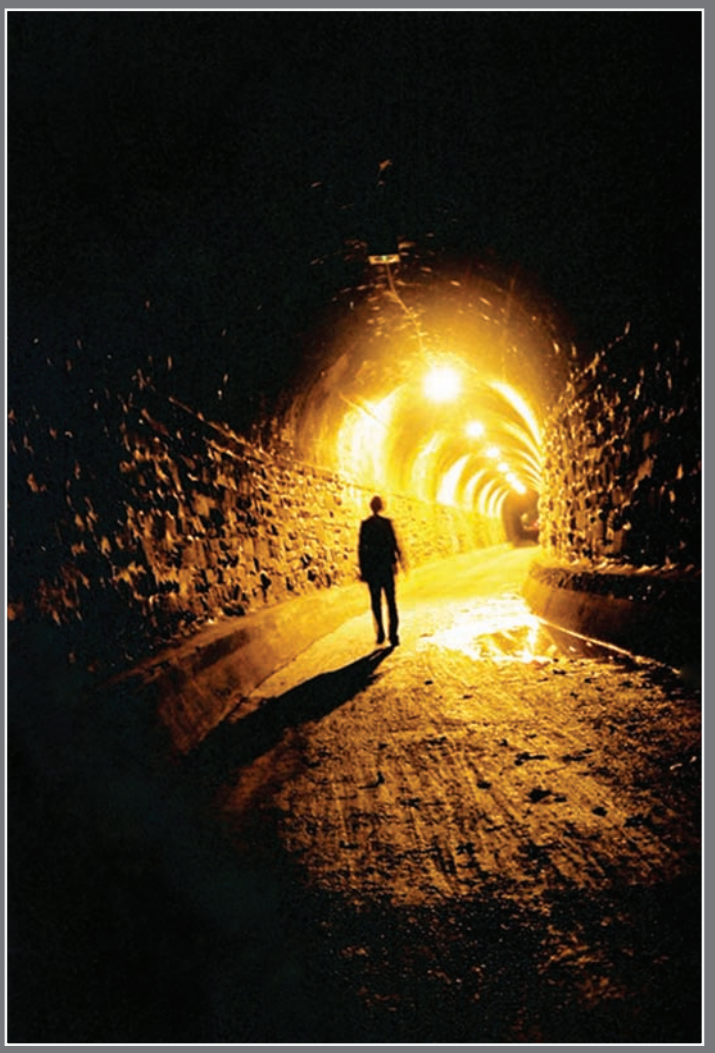
No wonder I devoured opportunity
when it finally deigned to show up on my doorstep
and even now I work through my hunger pangs
though this lovely kitchen has birch cabinetry far too genteel
to be acquainted with my primitive mechanics.

No wonder my voice is sharp when I speak with you.

And no wonder I eye your arms,
specially opened for the holidays
with scornful sapphire chips like those that shown down upon me
when I was skinny in my jeans.

And no wonder I say no, I don't want to come eat
ham and caviar
on Christmas in a room used twice a year.

And I am not sorry.



My Father's Tunnel
by Noor Alhomsi

Living Ocean I
by Sylvia Witting

Second Prize – Art
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

Spirit of Vitality
by Evan Nepala

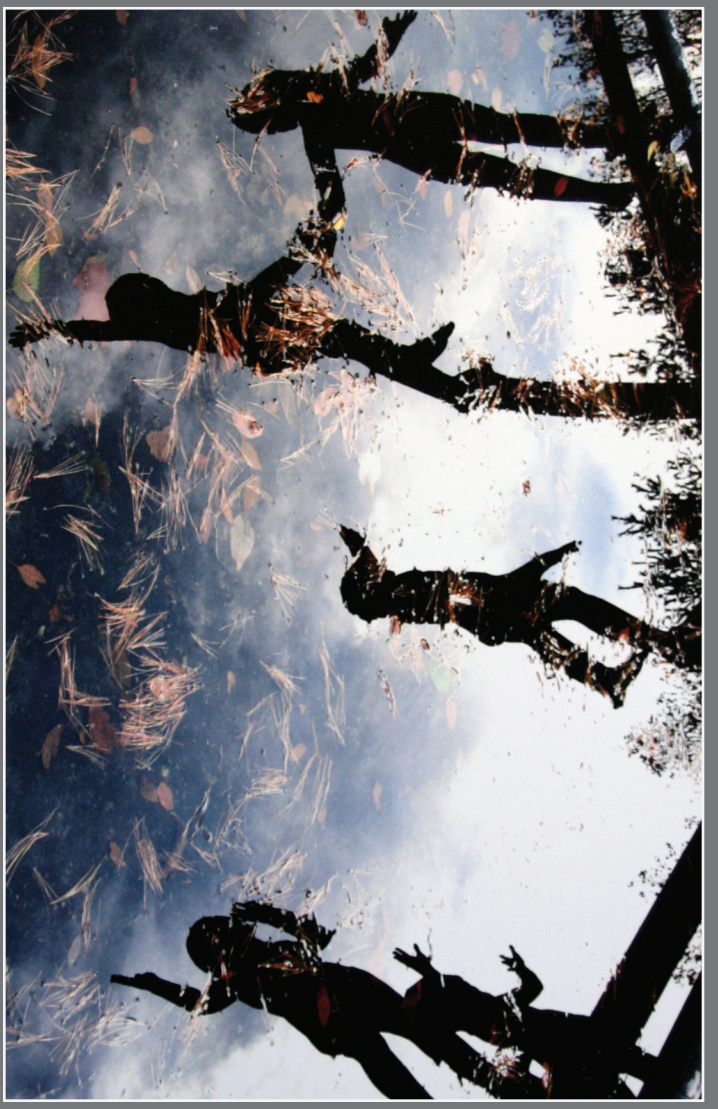
Honorable Mention – Art
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

Boone, NC
by Bita Ghavami

Grey and Cold Winter Morning
by Catherine Daniels Riveros

Collage
by Rachel Shirey

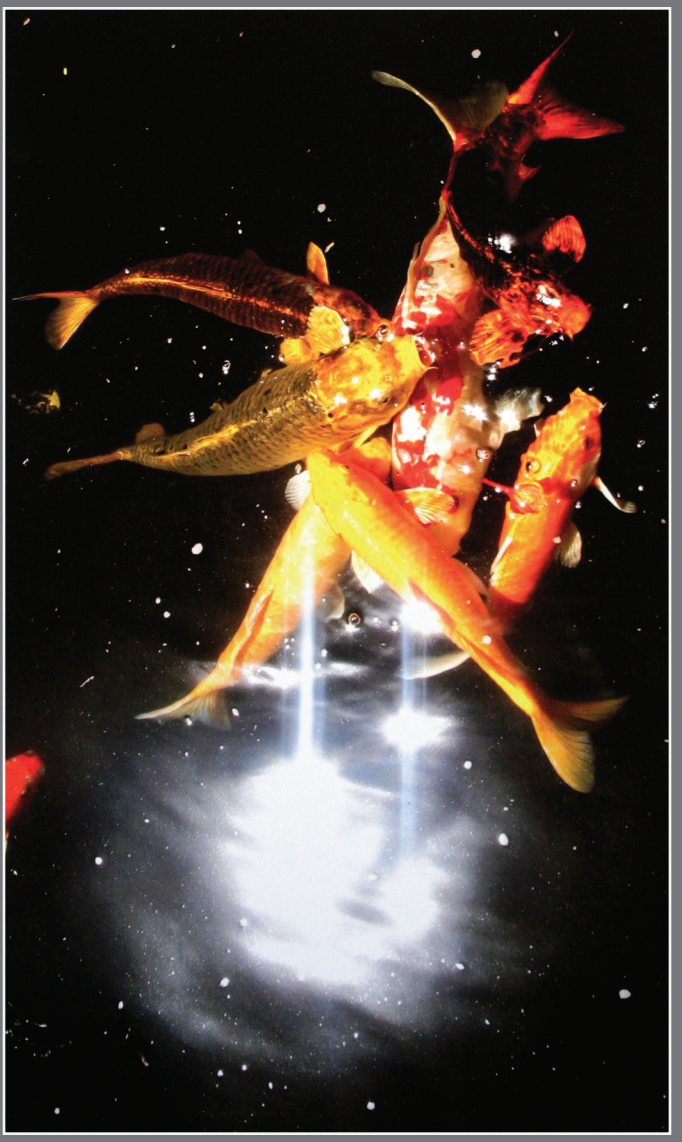
Third Prize – Art
Calliope Best in Publication 2008



Kids in the Water
by Evan Nepala

First Prize – Art
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

Headstrong
by Andrew Greeson



Koi Clustered
by Evan Nepala

Honorable Mention – Art
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

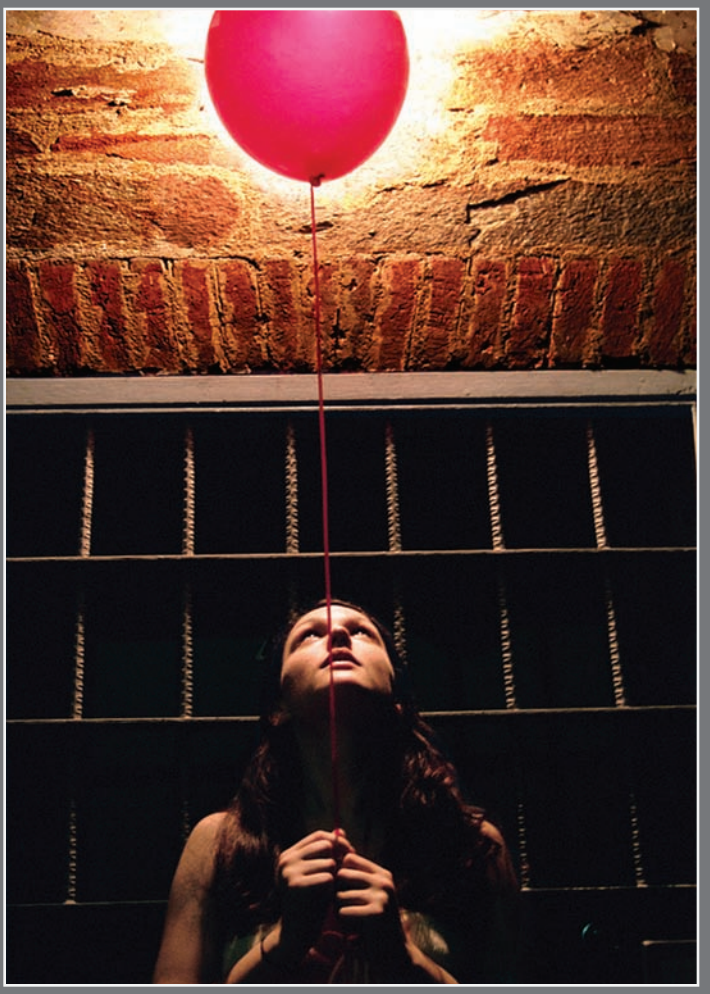
Hidden Face
by Alex Stasko

It'll Tickle Your Innards
by Andrew Greeson

Silo
by Oktawian Otlewski

Still Life in Drawing
by Natalia Schindledecker

Yellow Flower
by Rachel Shirey



The Red Balloon
by Noor Alhomsi

Lizard
by Grace Elizabeth Plant

GRADUATION

by M. Taylor Johnson

"They say they used to do things like this all the time," Hallie told me the night before graduation.

I turned from the mirror, hairbrush in hand, and glanced at my roommate. She was standing in front of the mirror, modeling her graduation gown. "Things like what?"

"You know. Things like graduation." She shrugged, black satin rippling around her shoulders. "I was talking to Ms. Hammett about it. She says that years ago, you used to live together. I mean, with your biological parents."

"Eww. Wouldn't they be *old?*" I wrinkled my nose and turned back to the mirror. "You wouldn't want to live with teachers, would you? It'd be like that."

"Yeah…" Hallie sounded like she wanted to say more, but her words trailed off. She picked up her mortarboard and balanced it on her head. "It just makes you wonder, you know? How did kids survive back then? How'd they learn anything?"

"Well, they went to school. Everyone had to go."

"Not everyone." Hallie took off her hat and dropped it on her bed, walked over to the vanity to lean against the wall. "Ms. Hammett says some kids stayed home until graduation. And then they didn't *have* a graduation."

I rolled my eyes. Ms. Hammett was a fun teacher, but some of the stuff she taught us sounded like she was just making it up. "Yeah, right. So who taught them?"

"Their parents."

"God. That's inhuman."

"Well, that's why they changed it. I mean, it's better for us to be in school with people who know what they're doing, right?"

"Yeah." I tossed my hair back over my shoulder and stared at my reflection for a moment. And then I burst into giggles.

"Where does Ms. Hammett *get* this stuff?"

* * *

In accordance with school tradition, the next morning was scheduled full of classes, but nobody did much learning. The playful rivalry between dorms had come to a head, with each building's seniors claiming they had the best decorations, the best dresses, the best dates. The teachers didn't do much to try to quell our distraction – I think most of them were as happy to be getting rid

of us as we were to get away.

Most of them. Not Ms. Hammett.

"Do you ever wonder about your parents?" she asked us, standing at the front of class, with a slideshow of images from the 20th century playing behind her.

We all exchanged looks. It wasn't a taboo question or something, just not something people normally asked about. Kind of like asking "what do you think about your shoe size?"

But Hallie surprised me.

"Yeah," she said. "I do wonder."

I gave her a *What the hell?* look, but she wasn't looking at me. Her eyes were fixed on Ms. Hammett.

Our weirdo teacher smiled and gestured to Hallie. "What are your thoughts about your parents, Hallie?"

Now she did glance at me, and her expression was surprisingly serious, her dark eyes deep and thoughtful. She swallowed and turned back to Ms. Hammett.

"I wonder what they're doing now," she said. "And I wonder if they're still alive, and if they've gotten divorced or not. And…" She stared down at her desk, hands clasped nervously.

"Yes?"

"Well, isn't it true parents used to tell their kids they loved them? I mean, even after they went off to school?"

A derisive murmur went around the classroom, words dropped here and there like little landmines, exploding in your head if you heard them. *Baby. Mama's girl. Weirdo.*

Hallie was unshakable. She just kept staring into space, staring at an idea none of the rest of us could see, a hope that none of us could picture.

"Hallie is right," Ms. Hammett said. "Expressions of affection from parent to child, and vice versa, used to be common not just in the preschool years, but throughout people's lives. It wasn't unusual for parents and children to keep in touch until the parents' death."

Now we knew she was making it up. I saw eyerolls going around. Ms. Hammett was off on another of her bizarre tangents. Everyone knew that parents and kids didn't give a damn about each other once the kids went off to school, and it didn't seem likely – didn't seem *possible* – that it had ever been otherwise.

"But it's so much better now," another girl pointed out. "We're safe. There were crazy parents, right? I mean, parents who, like, killed their kids and stuff. We don't have to be afraid of that happening now."

Ms. Hammett nodded complacently. "That's true. But there are some

people who think that parents should have more contact with their children. There are still lawsuits every year from parents who put their children into school and then changed their minds."

How embarrassing, I thought. *Having parents who don't know how to let go.*

"That's one of the reasons that we have graduation ceremonies," Ms. Hammett said. "It offers the parents a chance to see how truly independent their children are. By seeing the students accept their diplomas, any doubts the parents still have will be erased."

"But we don't get to see them."

It was Hallie. Of course. And she was absolutely serious, although what she was saying was absurd. Again.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, our parents know which one each of us is, right? 'Cause they call out the names. But we don't get to see our parents."

Ms. Hammett shook her head. "That's true. Do you think it would be better if you got to see your parents?"

Hallie bit her lip. She knew better than to say *yes* but the word was visible in her expression.

The bell rang and we burst out of the room like water from a pin-pricked water balloon, splashing into the hallway in a blur of motion and talk. I was swimming in words, drowning in chatter. *You hear that? – The kid must be – crazy! – I wouldn't go back to my parents for all the money in the world – Hammett's rubbing off on her –*

Someone grabbed my arm and I glanced up into Hallie's wide brown eyes. "Are you okay?" I asked her.

"Yeah." She stared at her shoes. "Let's go. We've got to get ready for tonight."

* * *

Later I would wonder if I had seen it coming. I would trace over every word I'd heard Hallie say over the past few days, every murmur, every laugh, and wonder if she'd told me through those little details what she was planning. But in the moment, I had no idea. I was distracted, of course, by a robe that I couldn't get to hang just right, a mortarboard that wouldn't quite balance. Shoes that squashed my big toes. Makeup. Any anxiety we felt that afternoon was forgotten, obscured by the comforting superficiality of dressing up.

I watched Hallie as she put on earrings and poked through her jewelry box for a matching necklace. She was wearing a smile, too, small but distinctly there, like she had a secret just bubbling to get out.

"You're really excited about this, aren't you," I commented, trying to sound casual.

She sat back with a sigh. “Yeah. I’m really excited.”

“It’s just graduation. You go and you get your diploma and you smile and you leave.”

“But it’s graduation. It only happens once.”

“Just be glad you’re not Marcus. He’s valedictorian and he’s got to make a speech.”

As time ticked down towards the event, everything started to blur, oversaturated in excitement. We scrambled through the halls, giggling nervously, the guys wrestling, slipping out of headlocks through the virtues of slippery satin robes. Teachers tried in vain to corral us; counselors, paid overtime, helped teary-eyed students through last-minute panic attacks. And then we were on the stage.

It was deadly quiet and painfully bright under the lights, and quite suddenly it didn’t seem funny or stressful or exciting. It didn’t seem anything. There was no room left for any emotions, no room left for anything but staring out at our parents.

They were all out there, not quite what we’d expected – but how would we know what to expect? They all seemed a bit too young or too old, too conservative or too fashionable, too tall or too short. They stared at us with such mixed emotions that I couldn’t begin to pick out any single one. Their faces were a blur of happy-scared-proud-anxious-excited-sad.

Someone was calling names. I watched as Cory, who used to eat glue in kindergarten while we egged him on, stepped up to take his diploma. A round of applause went up, and the sound of clapping might as well have been gunshots for how we all startled.

The names went on and on. I tried to swallow but my throat was sandpaper, my feet ice blocks, my hands sweaty and feeling swollen. My watch felt too tight. I heard my name and stepped up in a daze, took my diploma. Turned around and smiled at the auditorium. Stepped down next to Cory and the others.

Minutes later they called Hallie’s name. And that was when it happened.

She did not step up onto the podium. She did not move to take her diploma. She strode out across the stage and screamed.

“MAMAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA…”

The scream went out over the audience and we all stared after it as if it was a beast, an animal released from a cage, to see what it would do.

A woman in the fifth row stood up and reached out. “HALLIE!” she cried hoarsely. “My baby!”

Tears were streaming down Hallie’s face. She cried out one more time. “MAMA I LOVE YOU…”

“I LOVE YOU BABY!”

Suddenly the moment was over. Time returned to normal. Somebody was grabbing Hallie, pulling her back, away from the stage; and in the audience, someone was pulling the strange woman away. I stared at the grownup woman, and thought in my dazed calm *that is Hallie's mother. That's Hallie's mom.*

And then she was gone.

I slipped behind the curtain that hung behind us and found Hallie, restrained by two of the counselors, wiping at her tears but not crying. She was smiling, laughing, awash in teary-eyed joy. I went over to her and put a hand on her shoulder, confused. "Hallie, what's going on?" I asked.

"My mom," she gasped, hugging me, smiling. "She loves me. My mom loves me. I knew it."

Loading Dock Olley
by Bita Ghavami

Honorable Mention – Art
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

THIS IS THE BUSINESS WE'VE CHOSEN

by James Taube

I'd like to think of myself as a late bloomer. I've gone over this time and time again. What I should do, who I should be. And as I stare at middle age, I keep coming up with the same answer: I think I'd be really good at crime. It just calls to me: birds are meant to fly, the cheetah is meant to run and I… well…I was meant to work outside the law.

I've given this a lot of thought. I was watching the preview for that movie *American Gangster* when it hit me – BAM – this is my destiny. Not the Mafia, I'm not Italian and I don't own a suit, but illegal activities. The excitement, the danger, the hours – it has it all

When I told my mom about my plan she was speechless with joy. In fact, she was *so* speechless that she hasn't talked to me since, and she changed her locks (she probably figures a big shot conman like me doesn't need to sleep on his mother's futon anymore). Now that's pride! My sister was less supportive.

"Gordon", she said, "I think you need serious help."

Help? That's just crazy. I mean, hello? Being a renegade is kind of a one man job. What would I need a partner for? Boy, sometimes women can be so flakey.

After 25 years of unsatisfying work and dodging collection agencies, I'm ready for my American dream to come true. And that's what keeps me hopeful, the American dream. If this country guarantees one thing, it's that each one of its citizens will have complete personal and financial success. It's what the Founding Fathers fought for, so that every single one of their people would one day live in a mansion (or in their day, *plantation*) surrounded by only the best in material goods. It's that spirit that won the cold war, having the guts to stand up and say "Sorry Commies, you're not getting a red hand on *my* plantation!" And of course, those Ruskies lost big time!

Our nation's leaders took Florida from the Spanish (I think…maybe it was England), and Missouri from the Indians…or was it the French? And maybe Portugal was involved…it all has something to with the Great Compromise or the Gilded Age and the Era of Good Feelings, depending on when we sank the Lusitania…it's not important, that's the past! Either way let's just say most of the Midwest didn't just fall off a truck alright? The Louisiana Purchase only happened when Jefferson convinced Napoleon that most of Arkansas and about a third of Iowa was infested with what he called "Big scary invisible monsters." Plus slavery and the stuff with the Indians…whew, almost forgot about those.

This is usually the point where people run away, or begin dialing '9-1…' on their phones, but please, let me explain. I don't want to *hurt* anybody. I'll be like Robin Hood, "Take from the rich and give to the poor"! Unfortunately here in Patterson there aren't that many so called "rich people." There are upper-middle class people though, and that's a *kind* of rich. Also, because of my bills I can't really "give" the money to anyone right now except myself, but sometimes the best gifts are the ones you buy yourself, right? So maybe I won't be exactly like Robin Hood, but closer than you'd think: "Takes from the middle class and gives unto himself, and then eventually to stores in exchange for things he wants." Now that's a legend I want to see made into a Disney movie!

Every Friday I go home, sit back, relax, pop some popcorn, unfold my bed, wake up my ferret Flipsy and hop into the greatest cinematic tale ever told…I speak of course of Mario Puzo's trilogy, *The Godfather.* I would describe it for you, but I don't think I can. It would be like asking Michelangelo to describe the Sistine Chapel: no matter what he said it would just come off as a "real fancy ceiling." All I can tell you is that this film changed my life. I see now why all the politicians seem so concerned with family values. America is like the Corleone family, at times we're the wise old Don Vito, wise, calm, and talking as if we had marbles in our mouth. Sometimes we get a little too angry like Sonny and let our emotions get in the way (If I were President Bush, I'd avoid all the toll booths in Baghdad). But most of the time we're like Michael, we do some good things, some bad. All we're trying to do is protect the family, capiche?! Besides, do we want to be like our Consigliare Canada, looking good and doing good, but with none of the real action? And don't get me started on Mexico, or should I say Fredo? I think it's time to take our brother to the south out on the fishing boat, comprende?

That's why I want to start mugging people.

Just Kidding! Ever see Vito Corleone snatch an old ladies' purse? I don't *think* so. He was too busy discussing possible drug buys, ordering hits on his enemies and eating several oranges to bother with petty theft. That is the kinda criminal behavior I'm talking about! I already have a suit from the Men's Warehouse on layaway and I got a couple of tangerines from the Safeway (they were out of oranges), so as you can see all the pieces of "Don Gordon's" life are falling into place. "Leave the gun, take the cannoli?" No thanks Mr. Mobster, I want 'em both!

I see that you're looking me over. I know I don't have the body to be a thug or a heavy; I don't really like to work out. Maybe I could get some of those steroids all the baseball players take. That way, not only will I be muscular but I'll finally be able to hit a curveball. Who's the no talent pansy now, Coach McKenzie?! I don't really *need* to be a big tough guy to be a good criminal anyway. Most people won't be intimated when they see a 5'7", 145 lb. man

with adult acne and an increasingly lazy eye, but I think I can play that to my advantage. My small, child-like frame will lull them into a false sense of security when all of the sudden I look them dead in the eye and yell, "Stick 'em up chumps -- before I give ya a knuckle sandwich!" or something like that. I haven't really settled on my threat. I'm between that and "Freeze nerds! Prepare to be Abromowitzed!" Oh, that's my last name, Abramowitz. I'm hoping "Abramowitzed" will catch on like "Punk'd". Maybe 10 years from now I'll be watching the Super Bowl and instead of saying "interception" they'll say something like, "It looks like Shawn Springs just Abramowitzed Peyton Manning!" Now that's what I call Abramotainment! "

Image isn't everything. Look at Hannibal Lecter, he was just some old British guy, but he *ate* people – talk about tough! Do you have any idea how hard it is to digest a prison guard? I don't either, but it has *got* to cause some cramping.

I'll let you in on a secret; I've already started my new life. Just yesterday I was in Rite Aid and when the cashier wasn't looking I emptied out the "Take a penny, leave a penny" container. The way I'm going, I may never leave a penny again. I think I'm going to keep starting small, maybe take a pack of gum here, a new set of bowling shoes there. Work my way up to real, hardened criminal stuff like insider trading or redistributing Major League baseball without expressed written consent.

Now I know what you're thinking. "Crime is wrong, if you're a criminal, you're a bad person." Because that's what's been driven into your head since the first time you took somebody's Crayola Fun-pack in preschool. Well let me ask you this, was America a bad person when it left England? That's right, it wasn't. This is what I'm talking about, the essence of America. Casting off the shackles of persecution, doing what *you* think is right, no matter what the law books say. For me to become a criminal, I'm just fulfilling my American heritage, except instead of escaping religious persecution by building the new world, I will escape mediocrity by taking things that aren't mine. And if you think stealing isn't an American value, just ask Tonto, Princess Summerfall Winterspring and the rest of the Comanches and they'll tell you how American being a thief really is. If you deny my desire to turn to illegality, you are denying the U.S.A. Would you ask a cheetah not to run? Of course not, because a cheetah doesn't speak English, also it would probably run away before you could ask – because that's what cheetahs do.

JUST A BASTARD CHILD

by Carlos Rosales

Honorable Mention – Fiction
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

I was born out of wedlock. My mom, a Bolivian woman who drove a school bus, refused to marry my father. Five times he offered her a ring, and five times she declined, twice before I was born, and every year on my birthday until I turned three. My dad was Cuban, a short man with lots of tattoos and strange scars. He had a crucifix tattooed on his back; every time I went for a piggy-back ride I hugged Jesus.

When I was eight, my mom accepted the proposal of a man named Robert Boyd. They met when my mom starting going to St. Leo's, the Catholic Church in Harmony. Robert was taller than my father, a contractor who worked in Pittsburgh. While I hated my dad for abandoning me, I never managed to hate Robert for trying to replace him. At first, I was embarrassed by them. Imagine the teacher parent conference. A Latino woman and a white man – they looked like mismatched shoes. The day I met him, he told me his name was Robert, but I could call him Mr. Albino.

I always referred to him as just *Robert*. I never called him Mr. Albino, Bob, Robocop, Bob-Kabob, nor any of the nonsense he came up with me while trying to be my friend. He always pronounced my name *Duh-veed* – never did he call me David or Dave. Sometimes, a father knows best.

I was the only Hispanic kid on the bus. But I didn't see myself as a novelty; Harmony wasn't a hostile town. Most of the time, I could completely ignore my heritage until someone pointed it out. "You're Latino, right?" She was cute, petite, and for the short space of two weeks – my girlfriend.

"Uh, yeah…" I said, and suddenly, I didn't like her anymore. We were no longer just a boy and girl. I felt assaulted by doubt. I had a vague feeling, not shame or pride or like that, but a sharp tack in my chest, a feeling that told me that I would feel more at home traveling with a band of gypsies. Even gypsies didn't call themselves: gypsies. They just call themselves: people. When I remembered how little I knew about Cuba, I thought I might be some form of suburban gypsy: a culturally indigent person.

Too embarrassed to ask Robert for advice, especially when it came to girls, I went to my mom. "*Tienes que aprender a bailar,"* she said, "*salsa… merengue…* use your hips." Her advice was always short and cruel. Like when I was six and has just fallen riding my bicycle, "Don't you start crying! Go! *Otra vez*"

She never really exposed me to Bolivian culture, either. I guess she was

trying to raise the ideal Latino. Someone who was American first, the sort of Hispanic that could, one day run for congress or something. Someone with no foreign nationality of his own, the poster child of everywhere-where-Spanish-is-spoken.

Growing up, I'd tell my friends I never met my dad, or that my parents divorced when I was a baby, or that he had died in the war. What I did know is that he lived Pasadena and worked in a bakery. I knew I shouldn't be ashamed of him, but I couldn't help it. I knew that he had gotten married. He had fathered a boy whom he named David. He, my grandfather, my half brother and I all shared the same name. By the time I was fifteen, I decided to stick to on version of the story and just said he was dead.

He called one Christmas, "Don't be afraid of work, son. Remember that real men work with their hands." I just thought it was all just one pathetic excuse to why he couldn't find a better job. When I finally asked my mom why she never married him, she said.

"…because he never wanted anything. You ought to want something in life. You can't just walk around without wanting something."

If I were to sum up the amount of time my dad and I spoke to each other, I think it will only amount to a few hours. I've looked at it as one uninterrupted conversation: he afraid to go on and me afraid to end it.

"You're a *hombrecito* now," he said, two days after my thirteen birthday, "you need to know. Gringos are ignorant. They can't tell Peruvian from Venezuelan or Cuban from Bolivian. White people are awful; they don't care about who you are."

I, myself, had learned to recognize Bolivians from Peruvians, but still had a hard time telling Guatemalans and Salvadorians apart. Even when they spoke Spanish, their sentences collapsed into slurs and their accents swallowed entire syllables. Where they so different after all?

* * *

After my second year of college, I got a call from my grandfather in Cuba. He was ill, he said he thought about me a lot and wished he had gotten to know me better. He said everyone there was proud of me, and I wondered who everyone was.

The next morning, he died.

My mom made some phone calls, and I ended up taking the bus down to Pittsburgh to meet with some distant relatives. In an ethnic district, in what appeared to be a bad neighborhood, I met Carmela, my father's cousin. When I got to her house, everyone was praying. Everything was different. In this part of town, one ceased to be Latino and became Argentinean, Panamanian, Costa

Rican, Bolivian, Venezuelan, Cuban, Salvadorian, Columbian, Honduran, Chilean, Peruvian, Ecuadorian, Guatemalan, Mexican, Nicaraguan, Paraguayan, Puerto Rican, Dominican, or Uruguayan. I was just a bastard child here, nothing more.

Carmela, a black woman who sounded every syllable as Cuban as my grandfather, she said a few words. They had his portrait in the middle of the room; he didn't look older than thirty. I kind of looked like him. There were candles and flowers. Even Carmela's neighbors, none of whom had even met my grandfather, prayed for my grandfather's soul. I imagined what my father's funeral would be like. After a while, most of the relatives have left and more of neighborhood people came by and everyone started drinking rum. I met a girl named Gloria, with a beautiful dark complexion who seemed perplexed by my presence. She had left Cuba as a little girl, and noticed how most of my family had managed to marry other Cubans. Not long after I started a chat with her, a mean skinny guy started harassing me.

"Hey *gringito*," he said, "why don't you go back to whiteville."

"Don't mind Pedro," Gloria said. "He likes to mess with everybody."

"Screw you!" I said to him.

"Do you want to die?" He said, and I hesitated, was he a dangerous criminal or just another tough looking, tattoo-sporting, dim-witted construction worker?

"You heard me. Screw you."

"*Te voy a romper el alma, niño.*"

"Leave him alone," Gloria interrupted, and he grinned like an idiot.

"Keep an eye on your boyfriend."

I couldn't know. Maybe it was the rum, or because I felt inferior to him, or because he looked like my father.

"Fuck you!" I said, loud enough for everyone to hear. I saw his fist and then everything went black.

* * *

I woke up with a towel hanging down from my neck like a bib. I had the feeling of ants walking on my face and warm sensation in my ears. I was leaning against the stairs with my head on Gloria's lap while she held a wet cloth over my head.

"Morning sunshine," she said.

"What happened?" My face hurt.

"I still can't believe it." I leaned forward and vomited blood. I could see her painted toes. I felt proud.

"You're nose is broken," she said.

"Yeah?" I said doubting for a second, but I knew. I could feel something

misplaced on my face amidst the pain. She wiped the blood off my face; I rested my head on her lap.

"You got balls – that's for sure – but you got beaten like a woman."

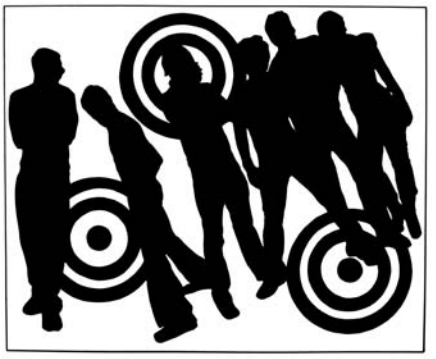
"Where's everybody?"

"Carmela asked them to leave." I struggled trying to get up. "She called your mom. Your step dad is on his way."

A few minutes later, Robert was there. Carmela and Gloria helped me to the car and Robert thanked them. We drove in silence for a bit, his jaw moving, but not saying anything. The turnpike was deserted. We stopped at a light; he had his hand on the dashboard cranking the heat. The lamppost at the crossroads looked like a cross.

"We don't have to go to the hospital now," he said, "unless you want to." I didn't reply. "It doesn't look too bad. You know, I broke my wrist playing Lacrosse once… it hurt like a bitch."

The car drifted across the intersection. I waited in silence, one awkward minute after another and my hands got cold. I thought about my father's scars and began to cry.



Bull's Eye
by Erin Findley

GRANDFATHER'S WALNUTS

by Kerry Butler

Honorable Mention – Non-Fiction
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

A carton of walnuts. That's what Grandfather would send us each year. Not a large box, but many, many nuts inside – plenty to fit in the fudge dad made, with many left over to crack apart up in our tree fort afterward. That is if there was a fort. Lots of places we lived there weren't trees on the land, or no houses being built to snatch wood from piles at night; or sometimes we lived in places that had no land at all. Regardless, it's the walnuts that transport me back to Grandpa. Of course I haven't received a box of nuts in years. He died decades ago, in his own bed, in the small house he owned aside a fruit grove in a California valley. In his tiny front yard was a very large, very old Walnut tree. I remember the fruit falling out of that tree – wrinkled black cocoons surrounding the nut inside. The nuts would find us every year no matter where we happened to be. Sometimes it took a month in the mail my mom would say. Other times it took only the time to go from yard to table – my grandfather walking in the door and setting them in front of me. Those would be the times my dad was off somewhere we could not follow along, my mom and I staying with my grandparents for "awhile".

I visited my grandmother later in life, and saw the house when I was much older, it being a lot smaller than remembered, but when I was six, it was huge, and mysterious, and full of secret places to explore. The most hidden and secluded was the cellar, where Grandpa kept his wine. I wasn't allowed down there *("When I was a child", my mother told me, "I hid from my parents in the cellar for two days after I spilled tables of grapes drying into raisins outside the house. When they found me, my father forgave me, but locked the cellar up").* Yet not having the cellar was alright with me because there was someplace even better. Between the house and the alley in the back was a dirt backyard, and at the rear of the backyard was an immense garage and within this perpetually dark garage was a vast, black gangster vehicle like I saw on the black and white television. Later in life my mother told me my grandfather owned a 57 Chevy Bel Air. I would creep into that garage and get into that car, the interior all scented up like warm plastic and glass, and dream of cops and robbers, chasing and catching.

When I was barely old enough to attend the first grade, my grandmother was feeding me bowlfuls of half-coffee/half-milk to drink for breakfast, along with a plate of potatoes with bits of sausage. Very hot, very spicy. Large meals

were sometime in the middle of the day, usually when the pasta dried well enough to cook. I have a picture in my mind of a large table in the dining room covered with a enormous sheet of dough, and of my mother helping to roll it up length-wise carefully; the roll being sliced with a knife like strudel – each thin slice unraveled to reveal a long, spaghetti-like strand which was left out to dry overnight. The next day these thick fibrils were snapped into serviceable pieces and dropped into a monstrous pot of water boiling over a gas flame, to soften before being served on a vast plate. A few pieces of meat were added to the gravy that accompanied the pasta and that was the meal. That and red wine and bread. I was allowed to drink the wine. My mother objected but my grandfather would shush her. A glass of water with a splash of wine to color it would appear at my plate. My grandparents made their own wine. I remember no dessert. But my stomach was very warm and full.

Night fell quickly in those days. Everyone read. Newspapers came in the evening, which my Mom read, and my grandfather would read papers written in Spanish. If my grandparents spoke to me, my mother translated most of what they said, even though Grandma knew more than Grandfather seemed to and would sometimes say some endearment or two in heavily accented English. They rarely spoke of themselves. They quarreled with my mother often (I heard from my bed). Later in life she told me it was over religion. They were strict Catholics and my mother had both defied them to elope and marry my father (in a time of war), and at some later point left the Church rather than agree to raise me according to the Catholic faith.

The last box of walnuts I remember receiving came when my father was gone again, this time in Vietnam. My grandfather's health had begun to decline and he was no longer up to the task of collecting them every year so we were lucky. By then I had learned how to make our family fudge. "Make some for your dad" mom said. So I did, sending it, saving the rest for us. Several years later Grandfather died. His funeral was immense, a Catholic rite proportional to his faith, and certainly he is where he believed he would rest forever. By then I had set out on my own, forgetting many of the events of my early childhood. My mother sent a picture of his casket and grave, so many flowers atop that whoever took it had to stand fifty yards back. A year or so later, as soon as I was able, I visited my grandmother and their house, and touched the walnut tree in the front yard. The old car was missing from the garage, given to a relative long ago, but the smell inside the building was the same. It was a surprise visit – Grandma had no idea I was coming. She was so small. The look on her face however, was huge – beyond description. She passed away six months later.

4 AM, MIDWEST SUNNY-SIDE UP

by Elizabeth "Izzi" Angel

Second Prize – Poetry
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

Egg-white light
overtakes burnt toast
heavens, meringue slowly.

On the fattier side
of our muffin-top
world with a small side
of jackalope-berry preserves,

a weary waitress pours out
her cuppa cawfee soul
to the insomniac truck
driver sporting a sunburnt neck
who's crunching through life
and bringing home the *other* bacon
for his double side of toddlers.

Thriving in the server's oven
is some wannabe-be sugar-
and-spice, blessing mommy
with pre-noon nausea.
5 A.M. doesn't register as such;
thank every dollar in there.

Ruby grapefruit floods
horizon-wise as the yolk
slips past the plate edge.

A VISIT TO THE AMERICAN MAUSOLEUM

By Colette Ann Shade

It happened one late night in August. I had been back home visiting the family, but for some reason I had to return to Washington quickly, even though it was a Saturday. I had put off leaving and put off leaving until it was around eleven o'clock, when I reluctantly left my parents' house, an imposing brick Cape Cod perched on a hill in the secret verdant suburbs. It is a newer house for this neighborhood, built in the forties, with a slate roof and copper gutters and deep windowsills, the kind of details developers have stopped bothering with long since. I hated to leave this place where I could simply be without thought, where I could pull the musty covers around myself and fall asleep to crickets and owls, and where I could come into my parents' room to say goodnight and my father would be lying in bed with work papers on his stomach, glancing over the top of his half-moon glasses with a furrowed brow. But I knew that if I was ever going to get back I would have to leave before tiredness consumed me.

For some reason, that particular evening I wanted the drive back to be more than a chore; I wanted it to be some sort of poignant experience. I wanted Baltimore to evoke the feelings it did when I first discovered it. I've tried so hard to explain Baltimore and its environs to people in the DC Metro area, but the truth is, they will never get it. The two cities aren't even places you can compare as parallels like New York and LA; it's like they exist in two entirely different worlds, with entirely different reference points and no communication between them. I was raised a child in Washington but came of age in Baltimore, then returned to my birthplace after high school because I thought there I'd find opportunity.

Whenever I'm driving back to Washington, I always take the interstate system, which is a bland, emotionless route lined with corrugated acoustic paneling. I thought that going through the city would give me a more palpable parting experience, and so I tried driving down the 83 Expressway and getting off downtown. I ended up circling blocks of the darkened tourist district, halting at crosswalks for straggling pedestrians making their way back to their hotels. I was trying to get to the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, but I kept ending up on one-way streets and crossing my own path again and again, and so I eventually gave up and resolved to take 83 back to Ruxton, from where I had come, and drive a mile out to the beltway entrance to take my usual route.

As I was trying to get back on Fleet Street, or Gay Street, or whatever

street would take me back to the expressway, I ended up on The Block, passing through the corridor of gaudy neon signs promoting Circus and Club Pussycat and other such establishments. There was an old policeman on the sidewalk, just standing there motionless like part of the decaying infrastructure of the city, keeping watch in the throng of long-shirted thugs in knockoff Bathing Apes and girls with clothes stretched tightly and French manicured nails that pointed to accompany shrill words; everybody milling from club to club and occasionally clogging the streets. Junkies shuffled down the sidewalk and prostitutes slunk by, slyly decreeing their services, and neither the revelers nor the somber officer paid them any mind.

There were creases set deep in the cop's face, and he wore the old fashioned uniform of Baltimore, the navy blue kind with the patent brimmed cap with points on the side, the kind that police caricatures in television shows wear, but has almost become irrelevant as fashions in most of the country have evolved. Because that is the crux of Baltimore: it is a city of the mid-twentieth century, a city that fooled itself into thinking the times would never change, and is now forced to come to terms with modernity.

The policeman's whole body seemed to sag under the weight of his heavy badge. You never see old police officers in Washington. You either get these strapping young recruits in Fairfax County, drunk on arrogance with their new gadgets and their knowledge that they have the funding and the proper socio-economic conditions to always win; or these jaded officers in the District and P.G. County who have the unimpeachable dignity of those who might not have as much, who seem, for all their rough talk and stern law and order, to keep a fatherly and almost gentle eye over the streets.

I never saw the old cop move. Throbbing bass spilled into the street from clubs and cars, and I thought about this frozen city, a living memorial to a time that is for Washington and for the majority of America, now preserved only in nostalgia. I thought about all the awful tourists who visit DC in the spring, clogging up the Metro and staring dumbly at the monuments advertised as tributes to America's past, when, for just a quarter tank of gas and an hour's drive north, they could see the real thing. And I realized that, if there is one parallel between the two cities, it is this: Washington has statues of marble. Baltimore has statues of men.

THE DOOMED WEDDING BELLS

by Alaa Alhajomar

Honorable Mention – Non-Fiction
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

The wedding was in November. Not just a normal wedding, but a wedding full of joy and happiness. Ashraf and Nadia had been engaged for years, and they finally planned their wedding day. My family and I got the invitation a week in advance; however, only three people were invited. I was one of them. Even though I had been to many wedding ceremonies in my life, this was a special one. My family and I left the United States for a few weeks and went to Amman, Jordan, for a vacation. I could not wait to arrive to Amman just so I would see the bride and the groom on their best day of their lives.

The day of the wedding came. I started preparing what I wanted to wear: "A black dress or a simple red skirt with a black shirt?" I asked myself. At the end, I planned on wearing my black dress, with a red necklace and red shoes. My parents were ready hours before I was. Of course, they were both wearing their fanciest clothes that showed how important the bride and the groom were to us. "Hurry up, Alaa" my mother yelled. I was not sure if I had everything I needed, but I did not want to be late to a wedding we have all been waiting for.

We left our house at exactly 7 p.m. That was considered late for Arab weddings. We arrived at the bride's house half an hour later. Music, drums, and people dancing and singing were the happy sounds of the day to come. The bride came, wearing her beautiful, big wedding gown that was full of sparkles and beads. I never imagined that a bride could look as pretty as Nadia looked. She looked like an angel who was sent to earth. Her groom was wearing his beautiful black tuxedo; the smile on his face was like the smile of a man who was re-united with his love. We were all happy for the both of them. They finally, almost, got married; the big day of their lives has arrived.

As the dancing and the singing stopped, and Nadia and Ashraf got ready to go to the hotel, where the wedding was supposed to take place, we were supposed to follow them. "Mom, did you see my purse?" I asked. "No, please do not tell me that you left it at home!"

"Sorry, but I think I did, can we go back and get it?"

My mom could not say no. The purse had the gift and the money we were going to present to the bride and the groom. On our way back to the car, I

heard the *future's* voice whisper in my ears. I saw a young, charming, innocent little girl asking her mother a question that no one ever imagined would be asked at a wedding:

"Mom, is that the bride?"

"Yes, honey. Isn't she so pretty?"

"Yeah, but why does she have blood stains all over her wedding dress"

"What are you talking about baby? Her dress is as white as snow"

The girl did not answer her mother. She was five years old, and knew nothing about life. He mother of course was very embarrassed when she noticed that I had heard what her daughter said. I smiled at her, thinking that the kid must have been insane to say such a spooky thing on a wedding day. The girl did seem a bit frightened, but of course no one cared. She was a child who probably had a hundred imaginary friends.

In the car, my mother gave me a speech on how late we were and how I was supposed to pay attention to what I brought with me. It was not my fault, however; she and my dad kept asking me to hurry up! By the time we arrived home and got the purse, we were more than forty five minutes late. I was extremely upset that I missed the very first part of the spectacular wedding.

The party was on; except that when we got to the hotel, we could not find available parking spaces. My dad had to go all the way to the other street in order to park. I could see the wedding from a distance. It was the most stunning thing I have ever seen. Fireworks were like beautiful thunders in the sky. Music and dancing reminded me of spring. Suddenly, I saw the beautiful thunder disappear. I saw spring turn into winter. Beautiful red and pink roses turned into harmful cactuses. The entire entrance was suddenly blown up to pieces. It was shining; however, it was not the sunshine. It was the shine of fire. It was like judgment day.

I did see dead people. I did see blood everywhere. I did see the bride turn wild after seeing her father lying on the floor, dead. I did see women screaming and kids crying. I saw everything. I wished at that moment that I had never been invited. I wished that I could go back in time and change the wedding day. I wished I could know who bombed the hotel and killed over thirty innocent people, including the bride's and the groom's fathers. At that moment, I remembered the innocent girl who wondered why the bride's dress was full of blood stains. "Could that be possible"? I asked myself. "Did she really predict what was about to happen? But how could she? She was only five years old for God's sake!" It did not sound real to me. Nothing looked or sounded real to me. It was like a nightmare I never got the chance to wake up from. It was the worst day of my life.

On my way back home, I was only thinking of the scene. I kept thinking that I could have been dead at that moment. The simple purse gave me a

chance to live, not only me, but my parents too. I did feel selfish that I only cared about my family. After a while, I started thinking about the groom and the bride. "What could have happened to them? What could have happened to the cherubic babies and the innocent people who were only trying to enjoy their lives and just have fun?" But I never got an answer.

I went home, tried to forget what had happened, but was never able to. The scenes never left my mind. They were horror scenes that would be stuck to me throughout my life. I did thank God however that I still had a chance to live. I spent the night praying to God in order to keep me and everyone else safe. I was not sure if Nadia and Ashraf's parents survived. However, I was sure that their big day was turned into a nightmare. The wedding was then on every single channel.

Everyone was talking about it on TV and in the newspapers, not only in Jordan, but also in the USA. When I returned to Virginia, I realized that the bombings were done by terrorists. They thought that by bombing a wedding, they could get rid of people against Islam. Nevertheless, all they did was kill Arabs and Muslims who just wanted to enjoy their time. I could not watch or read anything however. The memories of the wedding haunted my life and my dreams forever.

Did I stop attending weddings? No, of course; but I always made sure that I leave my purse at home, just so I would survive.

Inkwash
(after Diego Rivera)
by Dung T. Nguyen

LEFTOVERS

by Conner Morgan

When the butcher's van rolled up past our house towards the barn, my parents ordered my brother and me to stay in the house until they were finished.

"Everything should be done up in about an hour," my mother informed us. My stepfather came downstairs toting the large gun, long and oily and black; it must have been his most powerful shotgun, generally kept locked away in the safe upstairs.

"Why do we have to stay inside?" I asked my brother after they departed. My parents had never in the past chosen to shield us from the sometimes more nasty aspects of living on a farm. One of our barn cats lost a foot during hay season, probably snickered off by one whirring piece of equipment or another. It died after a few weeks of limping about, and it was me who buried it out by the storage shed. But this was the first steer we would kill for our own personal consumption.

"Oh, it's probably the gun or whatever," he informed me. "They don't really need a ton of people out there while they shoot it. Besides, why would you want to watch them shoot the cow?"

Steers are cows that are born to die. Their testicles are removed at a certain age, and, their energy diverted away from reproduction, they spend the remainder of their lives building muscle mass. Their lives are about two years long, and then they are dispatched and eaten.

"I just want to see what happens."

"They tie it up, put a bucket of corn in front of it to eat, and then shoot it in the head. Then the butcher or whoever I guess takes it away and we pick it up in about a week. I don't see what's so interesting, anyway."

His casual denial indicated he wanted to see what was going on just as bad as I did, but had been equally unable to persuade my parents. Being of increased age and stature, they had at least provided him with these very important details, with which I could flesh out my imaginings.

I was not a particularly morbid child, but had never seen something die and was therefore interested. A few months before I'd watched the cow I owned give birth to a calf, munching for half an hour at the placenta while the baby struggled on its spindly legs to stand. So logically, I figured, if I watched something come into this world, I probably had a right to see something taken out of it. At nine years old, things of this nature are of utmost importance, and terribly frightening and exciting.

"All taken care of," my mother announced when they returned perhaps an hour later. My father headed back upstairs with the gun and she went to wash

her hands in the bathroom. Neither was splattered with blood or anything sufficiently dramatic, so I donned my rubber boots and set out towards the barn with the intent of investigating.

Nothing inside the barn was outside of the ordinary; the bucket of corn had most likely been replaced in the feed bin and there were no signs of drama. On my way out of the barn, I noticed that the wheelbarrow had been moved up close to the door.

The oxidized old wheelbarrow was filled almost to the top with a congealed soup of mottled green, semi-digested grass, the entire contents of the full-grown steer's circuitous digestive tract emptied unceremoniously into the container I used to haul rocks out of the field and move hay to cover up my strawberries for the winter. Cows are enormous creatures, but one grows accustomed to their bulk, and I never realized how much grass, exactly, went inside of one, and how much vegetation it must take to keep one alive. The slimy, ruminated grass in my wheelbarrow was a very precise measurement of this amount and was all that was left of the butchered steer.

I wandered back inside the house.

"There's a wheelbarrow full of grass out there," I said to my mother.

"Yeah, it's leftover from the steer. I thought you knew." Remembering my prior interest, she asked, "Do you want me to tell you more about what's going to happen to the steer when it gets to the butcher's?"

Unable to feed upon the energy of the sun, we non-plant life forms are forced to take our energy from the other living beings around us: cat, cow, human, all locked into a cycle of consumption from our births to our deaths. What I wanted her to tell me was how to properly pay homage to something that had died so that I could live. Sadly, the questions that are the most important to ask are often difficult to formulate and nearly impossible to elucidate.

"No thanks," I mumbled, and trudged upstairs to my room.

BUTTERFLIES

by Elizabeth Wright

Second Prize – Fiction
Calliope Best in Publication 2008

Why do butterflies never fly in a straight path? Because they must be in love. Silly little butterflies.

He walked her to her car like he always did because, after all, he is a gentleman and gentlemen do that. He always hugged her too but she knew that sort of hug. She always wondered why he did not hug her differently if he always walked her to her car? Eleanor and Charles had known each other for years and could not remember exactly where they had met; to Eleanor it was as if she had always known him. Even when she knew she had not known him, she still felt like he was there.

She did not know exactly when the butterflies began. Maybe it was when they had eaten an entire carton of ice-cream together, or drove for hours just listening to the radio after Charles had a very bad day. But at some point the butterflies began. At first there were only a few that bumped into each other lazily in her stomach when he walked her to her car, but each time he hugged her one more little feeling would join the others. She would tell herself they were silly little butterflies and she would be all right in a moment; but they kept fluttering.

When the butterflies grew and would not go away, she decided she could not take it anymore, and she would let them out. She would tell him what she felt because she was not really sure if he knew or not, but surely he must know. Eleanor made up her mind to tell him.

He walked her to her car again and they talked again like they usually do, but the mass in Eleanor's stomach grew like it had never done before because she knew she was going to tell him. It pulsed and stretched on her chest until it grew so big it was against her throat pushing to escape. Eleanor held her lips tightly together to keep her thoughts in till just the right moment. They were in her mouth now, he was asking her something she did not really hear, when "What about me?" Out it slipped. A beautiful tongue of red and orange lightly fluttered about them, free. Her thoughts were free.

The only thing she could hear was her heart beat, like the throbbing of tiny wings. She stood there wondering what he was thinking, was it too late to catch it and hide it again? Was it too late to say she did not mean it? Yes. It hung in the air between them. "What?" Charles asked quietly. It was too late to catch it now. Suddenly it came; she opened her mouth and out came her thoughts and

feelings like a swarm of beautiful butterflies, all vibrant colors, all movement and life, all free.

She told him what she thought of him and why did he not see her? She told him everything she ever felt and why did he not hug her differently? It all came out flying. It seemed it would never end; the air was filled with them and they were impossible to ignore, and they were so beautiful. It was as if the air was aglow with the fire of little wings. But for all their crazy movement and erratic flight they never once touched another butterfly; it was a perfect dance.

He looked at her, through the thoughts, through the butterflies. Carefully he reached out and a butterfly lighted on his hand. No, please don't. She did not mean it, they weren't really hers – don't hurt them.

"Wow. I had no idea," he looked at the delicate creature in his hand. "But, how can you think that I could love you like that?" slowly and very deliberately he closed his hand and silently crushed the butterfly. "You and I are like, brother and sister, right? I couldn't – I mean you can't even –" he stopped short. "You know what I'm trying to say. I'll call you later?" He said good-bye and carefully put her wheelchair in the back seat. Then he smiled at her and walked away without hugging her. Her stomach was completely empty; she was totally void of emotions. As she looked around her, all she saw hundreds of crushed butterflies.

It took time, like all living things take time, and he does not walk her to her car anymore; he does not touch her at all anymore. But after a while the fuzzy caterpillar inside her heart she did not know was there hatched; into a butterfly.

NOVA Northern Virginia Community College